

The Sketch

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SIXPENCE.



PASSING FAIR—THE MERRY MAID OF MAXIM'S: MR. GEORGIE MAHRER AND MISS GABRIELLE RAY
IN "THE MERRY WIDOW."

Photograph by Bassano.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.



The first opinion given to me regarding Jacob Settle was a simple descriptive statement, "He's a down-in-the-mouth chap"; but I found that it embodied the thoughts and ideas of all his fellow-workmen. There was in the phrase a certain easy tolerance, an absence of positive feeling of any kind, rather than any complete opinion, which marked pretty accurately the man's place in public esteem. Still, there was some dissimilarity between this and his appearance which unconsciously set me thinking, and by degrees, as I saw more of the place and the workmen, I came to have a special interest in him. He was, I found, for ever doing kindnesses, not involving money expenses beyond his humble means, but in the manifold ways of forethought and forbearance and self-repression which are of the truer charities of life. Women and children trusted him implicitly, though, strangely enough, he rather shunned them, except when anyone was sick, and then he made his appearance to help if he could, timidly and awkwardly. He led a very solitary life, keeping house by himself in a tiny cottage, or, rather, hut, of one room, far on the edge of the moorland. His existence seemed so sad and solitary that I wished to cheer it up, and for the purpose took the occasion when we had both been sitting up with a child injured by me through accident to offer to lend him books. He gladly accepted, and as we parted in the grey of the dawn I felt that something of mutual confidence had been established between us.

The books were always most carefully and punctually returned, and in time Jacob Settle and I became quite friends. Once or twice as I crossed the moorland on Sundays I looked in on him; but on such occasions he was shy and ill at ease, so that I felt diffident about calling to see him. He would never under any circumstances come into my own lodgings.

One Sunday afternoon, I was coming back from a long walk beyond the moor, and as I passed Settle's cottage stopped at the door to say "How do you do?" to him. As the door was shut, I thought that he was out, and merely knocked for form's sake, or through habit, not expecting to get any answer. To my surprise, I heard a feeble voice from within, though what was said I could not hear. I entered at once, and found Jacob lying half-dressed upon his bed. He was as pale as death, and the sweat was simply rolling off his face. His hands were unconsciously gripping the bed-clothes as a drowning man holds on to whatever he may grasp. As I came in he half arose, with a wild, hunted look in his eyes, which were wide open and staring, as though something of horror had come before him; but when he recognised me he sank back on the couch with a smothered sob of relief and closed his eyes. I stood by him for a while, quite a minute or two, while he gasped. Then he opened his eyes and looked at me, but with such a despairing, woful expression that, as I am a living man, I would have rather seen that frozen look of horror. I sat down beside him and asked after his health. For a while he would not answer me except to say that he was not ill; but then, after scrutinising me closely, he half arose on his elbow and said—

"I thank you kindly, Sir, but I'm simply telling you the truth. I am not ill, as men call it, though God knows whether there be not worse sicknesses than doctors know of. I'll tell you, as you are so kind, but I trust that you won't even mention such a thing to a living soul, for it might work me more and greater woe. I am suffering from a bad dream."

"A bad dream!" I said, hoping to cheer him; "but dreams pass

away with the light—even with waking." There I stopped, for before he spoke I saw the answer in his desolate look round the little place.

"No! no! that's all well for people that live in comfort and with those they love round them. It is a thousand times worse for those who live alone and have to do so. What cheer is there for me, waking here in the silence of the night, with the wide moor around me full of voices and full of faces that make my waking a worse dream than my sleep? Ah, young Sir, you have no past that can send its legions to people the darkness and the empty space, and I

pray the good God that you may never have!" As he spoke, there was such an almost irresistible gravity of conviction in his manner that I abandoned my remonstrance about his solitary life. I felt that I was in the presence of some secret influence which I could not fathom. To my relief, for I knew not what to say, he went on—

"Two nights past have I dreamed it. It was hard enough the first night, but I came through it. Last night the expectation was in itself almost worse than the dream—until the dream came, and then it swept away every remembrance of lesser pain. I stayed awake till just before the dawn, and then it came again, and ever since I have been in such an agony as I am sure the dying feel, and with it all the dread of to-night." Before he had got to the end of the sentence my mind was made up, and I felt that I could speak to him more cheerfully.

"Try and get to sleep early to-night—in fact, before the evening has passed away. The sleep will refresh you, and I promise you there will not be any bad dreams after to-night." He shook his head hopelessly, so I sat a little longer and then left him.

When I got home I made my arrangements for the night, for I had made up my mind to share Jacob Settle's lonely vigil in his cottage on the moor. I judged that if he got to sleep before sunset he would wake well before midnight, and so, just as the bells of the city were striking eleven, I stood opposite his door armed with a bag, in which were my supper, an extra large flask, a couple of candles, and a book. The moonlight was bright, and flooded the whole moor, till it was almost as light as day; but ever and anon black clouds drove across the sky, and made a darkness which by comparison seemed almost tangible. I opened the door softly, and entered without waking Jacob, who lay asleep with his white face upward. He was still, and again bathed in sweat. I tried to imagine what visions were passing before those closed eyes which could bring with them the misery and woe which were stamped on the face, but fancy failed me, and I waited for the awakening. It came suddenly, and in a fashion which touched me to the quick, for the hollow groan that broke from the man's white lips as he half arose and sank back was manifestly the realisation or completion of some train of thought which had gone before.

"If this be dreaming," said I to myself, "then it must be based on some very terrible reality. What can have been that unhappy fact that he spoke of?"

While I thus spoke, he realised that I was with him. It struck me as strange that he had no period of that doubt as to whether dream or reality surrounded him which commonly marks an unexpected environment of waking men. With a positive cry of joy, he seized my hand and held it in his two wet, trembling hands, as a frightened child clings on to someone whom it loves. I tried to soothe him—

"There, there! it is all right! I have come to stay with you to-night, and together we will try to fight this evil dream." He let go my hand suddenly, and sank back on his bed and covered his eyes with his hands.

"Fight it?—the evil dream! Ah! no, Sir, no! No mortal power can fight that dream, for it comes from God—and is burned in here;" and he beat upon his forehead. Then he went on—

"It is the same dream, ever the same, and yet it grows in its power to torture me every time it comes."

"What is the dream?" I asked, thinking that the speaking of it might give him some relief; but he shrank away from me, and after a long pause said—

"No, I had better not tell it. It may not come again." There was manifestly something to conceal from me—something that lay behind the dream, so I answered—

"All right. I hope you have seen the last of it. But if it should come again, you will tell me, will you not? I ask, not out of curiosity, but because I think it may relieve you to speak." He answered with what I thought was almost an undue amount of solemnity—

"If it comes again, I shall tell you all."

Then I tried to get his mind away from the subject to more mundane things, so I produced supper, and made him share it with me, including the contents of the flask. After a little he braced up, and when I lit my cigar, having given him another, we smoked a full hour, and talked of many things. Little by little the comfort of his body stole over his mind,

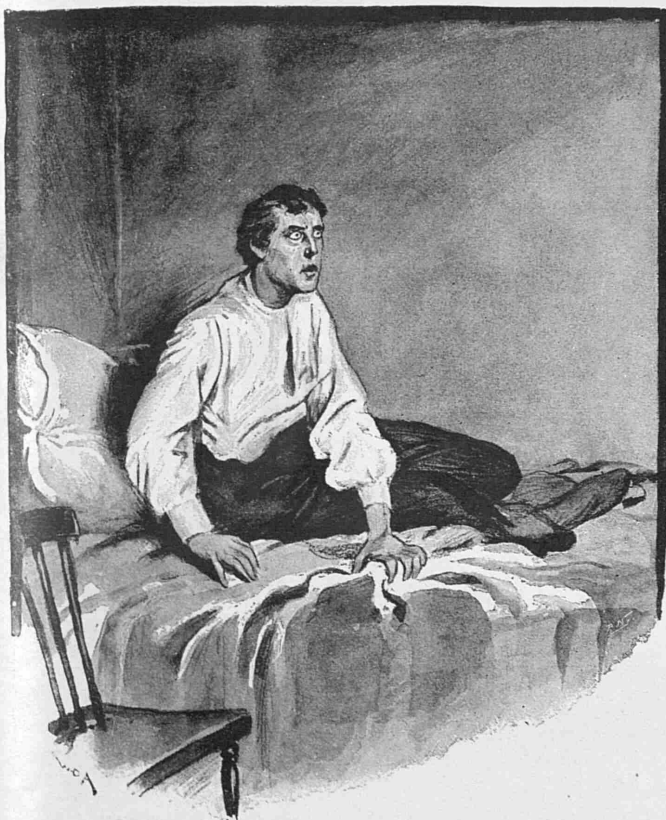
and I could see sleep laying her gentle hands on his eyelids. He felt it, too, and told me that now he felt all right, and I might safely leave him; but I told him that, right or wrong, I was going to see in the daylight. So I lit my other candle, and began to read as he fell asleep.

By degrees I got interested in my book, so interested that presently I was startled by its dropping out of my hands. I looked and saw that Jacob was still asleep, and I was rejoiced to see that there was on his face a look of unwonted happiness, while his lips seemed to move with unspoken words. Then I turned to my work again, and again woke, but this time to feel chilled to my very marrow by hearing the voice from the bed beside me—

"Not with those red hands! Never! never!" On looking at him, I found that he was still asleep. He woke, however, in an instant, and did not seem surprised to see me; there was again that strange apathy as to his surroundings. Then I said—

"Settle, tell me your dream. You may speak freely, for I shall hold your confidence sacred. While we both live I shall never mention what you may choose to tell me."

"I said I would; but I had better tell you first what goes before the dream, that you may understand. I was a schoolmaster when I was a very young man; it was only a parish school in a little village in the



He half arose, with a wild, hunted look in his eyes.

West Country. No need to mention any names. Better not. I was engaged to be married to a young girl whom I loved and almost revered. It was the old story. While we were waiting for the time when we could afford to set up house together, another man came along. He was nearly as young as I was, and handsome, and a gentleman, with all a gentleman's attractive ways for a woman of our class. He would go fishing, and she would meet him while I was at my work in school. I reasoned with her and implored her to give him up. I offered to get married at once and go away and begin the world in a strange country; but she would not listen to anything I could say, and I could see that she was infatuated with him. Then I took it on myself to meet the man and ask him to deal well with the girl, for I thought he might mean honestly by her, so that there might be no talk or chance of talk on the part of others. I went where I should meet him with none by, and we met!" Here Jacob Settle had to pause, for something seemed to rise in his throat, and he almost gasped for breath. Then he went on—

"Sir, as God is above us, there was no selfish thought in my heart that day; I loved my pretty Mabel too well to be content with a part of her love, and I had thought of my own unhappiness too often not to have come to realise that, whatever might come to her, my hope was gone. He was insolent to me—you, Sir, who are a gentleman, cannot know, perhaps, how galling can be the insolence of one who is above you in station—but I bore with that. I implored him to deal well with the girl, for what might be only a pastime of an idle hour with him might be the breaking of her heart. For I never had a thought of her truth, or that the worst of harm could come to her—it was only the unhappiness to her heart I feared. But when I asked him when he intended to marry her his laughter galled me so that I lost my temper

and told him that I would not stand by and see her life made unhappy. Then he grew angry too, and in his anger said such cruel things of her that then and there I swore he should not live to do her harm. God knows how it came about, for in such moments of passion it is hard to remember the steps from a word to a blow, but I found myself standing over his dead body, with my hands crimson with the blood that welled from his torn throat. We were alone, and he was a stranger, with none of his kin to seek for him, and murder does not always out—not all at once. His bones may be whitening still, for all I know, in the pool of the river where I left him. No one suspected his absence, or why it was, except my poor Mabel, and she dared not speak. But it was all in vain, for when I came back again after an absence of months—for I could not live in the place—I learned that her shame had come and that she had died in it. Hitherto I had been borne up by the thought that my ill deed had saved her future, but now, when I learned that I had been too late, and that my poor love was smirched with that man's sin, I fled away with the sense of my useless guilt upon me more heavily than I could bear. Ah! Sir, you that have not done such a sin don't know what it is to carry it with you. You may think that custom makes it easy to you, but it is not so. It grows and grows with every hour, till it becomes intolerable: and with it growing, too, the feeling that you must for ever stand outside Heaven. You don't know what that means, and I pray God that you never may. Ordinary men, to whom all things are possible, don't often, if ever, think of Heaven. It is a name, and nothing more, and they are content to wait and let things be; but to those who are doomed to be shut out for ever you cannot think what it means; you cannot guess or measure the terrible, endless longing to see the gates opened, and to be able to join the white figures within.

"And this brings me to my dream. It seemed that the portal was before me, with great gates of massive steel with bars of the thickness of a mast, rising to the very clouds, and so close that between them was just a glimpse of a crystal grotto, on whose shining walls were figured many white-clad forms with faces radiant with joy. When I stood before the gate my heart and my soul were so full of rapture and longing that I forgot. And there stood at the gate two mighty angels with sweeping wings, and oh! so stern of countenance. They held each in one hand a flaming sword, and in the other the latchet, which moved to and fro at their lightest touch. Nearer were figures all draped in black, with heads covered so that only the eyes were seen, and they handed to each who came white garments such as the angels wear. A low murmur came that told that all should put on their own robes, and without soil, or the angels would not pass them in, but would smite them down with the flaming swords. I was eager to don my own garment, and hurriedly threw it over me and stepped swiftly to the gate; but it moved not, and the angels, loosing the latchet, pointed to my dress. I looked down, and was aghast, for the whole robe was smeared with blood. My hands were red; they glittered with the blood that dripped from them as on that day by the river bank. And then the angels raised their flaming swords to smite me down, and the horror was complete—I awoke. Again, and again, and again, that awful dream comes to me. I never learn from the experience, I never remember, but at the beginning the hope is ever there to make the end more appalling; and I know that the dream does not come out of the common darkness where the dreams abide, but that it is sent from God as a punishment! Never, never shall I be able to pass the gate, for the soil on the angel garments must ever come from these bloody hands!"

I listened as in a spell as Jacob Settle spoke. There was something so far away in the tone of his voice—something so dreamy and mystic in the eyes that looked as if through me at some spirit beyond—something so lofty in his very diction and in such marked contrast to his work-worn clothes and his poor surroundings that I wondered if the whole thing were not a dream.

We were both silent for a long time. I kept looking at the man before me in growing wonderment. Now that his confession had been made, his soul, which had been crushed to the very earth, seemed to leap back again to uprightness with some resilient force. I suppose I ought to have been horrified with his story, but, strange to say, I was not. It certainly is not pleasant to be made the recipient of the confidence of a murderer, but this poor fellow seemed to have had, not only so much provocation, but so much self-denying purpose in his deed of blood that I did not feel called upon to pass judgment upon him. My purpose was to comfort, so I spoke out with what calmness I could, for my heart was beating fast and heavily—

"You need not despair, Jacob Settle. God is very good, and His mercy is great. Live on and work on in the hope that some day you may feel that you have atoned for the past." Here I paused, for I could see that sleep, natural sleep this time, was creeping upon him. "Go to sleep," I said; "I shall watch with you here, and we shall have no more evil dreams to-night."

He made an effort to pull himself together, and answered—

"I don't know how to thank you for your goodness to me this night, but I think you had best leave me now. I'll try and sleep this out; I feel a weight off my mind since I have told you all. If there's anything of the man left in me, I must try and fight out life alone."

"I'll go to-night, as you wish it," I said; "but take my advice, and do not live in such a solitary way. Go among men and women; live among them. Share their joys and sorrows, and it will help you to forget. This solitude will make you melancholy mad."

"I will!" he answered, half unconsciously, for sleep was overmastering him.

I turned to go, and he looked after me. When I had touched the latch I dropped it, and, coming back to the bed, held out my hand. He grasped it with both his as he rose to a sitting posture, and I said my good-night, trying to cheer him—

"Heart, man, heart! There is work in the world for you to do, Jacob Settle. You can wear those white robes yet and pass through that gate of steel!" Then I left him.

A week after I found his cottage deserted, and on asking at the works was told that he had "gone north"—no one knew exactly whither.

Two years afterwards, I was staying for a few days with my friend Dr. Munro in Glasgow. He was a busy man, and could not spare much time for going about with me, so I spent my days in excursions to the Trossachs and Loch Katrine and down the Clyde. On the second last evening of my stay I came back somewhat later than I had arranged, but found that my host was late too. The maid told me that he had been sent for to the hospital—a case of accident at the gas-works, and the dinner was postponed an hour; so, telling her I would stroll down to find her master and walk back with him, I went out. At the hospital I found him washing his hands preparatory to starting for home. Casually, I asked him what his case was.

"Oh, the usual thing! A rotten rope and men's lives of no account. Two men were working in a gasometer, when the rope that held their scaffolding broke. It must have occurred just before the dinner hour, for no one noticed their absence till the men had returned. There was about seven feet of water in the gasometer, so they had a hard fight for it, poor fellows. However, one of them was alive, just alive, but we have had a hard job to pull him through. It seems that he owes his life to his mate, for I have never heard of greater heroism. They swam together while their strength lasted, but at the end they were so done up that even the lights above, and the men slung with ropes, coming down to help them, could not keep them up. But one of them stood on the bottom and held up his comrade over his head, and those few breaths made all the difference between life and death. They were a shocking sight when they were taken out, for that water is like a purple dye with the gas and the tar. The man upstairs looked as if he had been washed in blood. Ugh!"

"And the other?"

"Oh, he's worse still. But he must have been a very noble fellow. That struggle under the water must have been fearful; one can see that by the way the blood has been drawn from the extremities. It makes the idea of the *Stigmata* possible to look at him. Resolution like his could, you would think, do anything in the world. Ay! it might almost unbar the gates of Heaven. Look here, old man, it is not a very pleasant sight, especially just before dinner, but you are a writer, and this is an odd case. Here is something you would not like to miss, for in all human probability you will never see anything like it again." While he was speaking he had brought me into the mortuary of the hospital.

On the bier lay a body covered with a white sheet, which was wrapped close round it.

"Looks like a chrysalis, don't it? I say, Jack, if there be anything in the old myth that the soul is typified by a butterfly, well, then the one that this chrysalis sent forth was a very noble specimen and took all the sunlight on its wings. See here!" He uncovered the face. Horrible, indeed, it looked, as though stained with blood. But I knew him at once, Jacob Settle! My friend pulled the winding sheet further down.

The hands were crossed on the purple breast as they had been reverently placed by some tender-hearted person. As I saw them, my heart throbbed with a great exultation, for the memory of his harrowing dream rushed across my mind. There was no stain now, on those poor, brave hands, for they were blanched white as snow.

And somehow as I looked I felt that the evil dream was all over. That noble soul had won a way through the gate at last. The white robe had now no stain from the hands that had put it on.

BAD LANGUAGE AMONG CHILDREN.

Is it not about time for the "powers that be" to do something to check the epidemic of bad language at present raging among the metropolitan street-boys? Nowadays, the great thoroughfares of London simply reek with blasphemy. You cannot pass by any collection of roughs and idlers without hearing oaths that would almost shock a stage-manager. Not only do youths in their teens vie with their elders and indulge in this repulsive habit, but little children take the example. The other day I went through Drury Lane in the evening, and paused

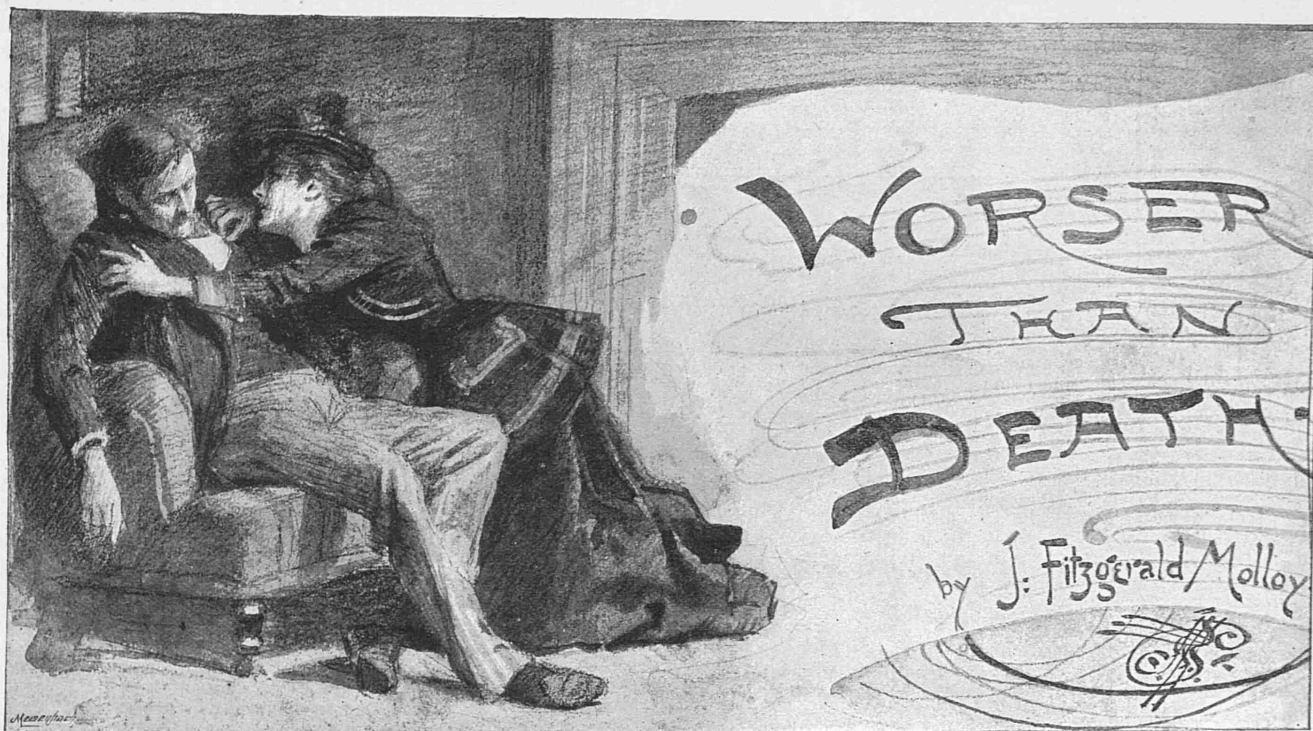


"I found myself standing over his dead body."

for a moment to watch four or five little children who were revelling in the delights of hop-scotch, a game with whose mysteries I am not familiar. Something caused a disagreement, and from the lips of these boys and girls there came a torrent of foul words. Nobody appeared to pay any attention to it, although one of the worst of the offenders could not have been more than eight or nine years old. Although I hold that, when something unexpectedly provoking happens, a man is entitled to relieve his feelings by the use of what Mr. Zangwill calls the first syllable of damage, indiscriminate swearing is at all times reprehensible. With the large number of screaming societies to be met nowadays, it seems a pity that steps are not promptly taken to stamp out this growing danger. By an old statute, the use of bad language is an offence. When I started to make this note I had a vague recollection of one of those short stories written by Charles Dickens, in which he describes a conviction he secured by reminding or informing a policeman of his powers. Anxious to authenticate my remarks, I went to my book-case, but searched in vain for the narrative. I turned to Stephens' "Commentaries on the Laws of England," and found the authority.

B.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.



They had been close and warm friends from their college days, sharing confidences with and having no secrets from each other; and now, when Colin Rae was about taking an important step in life, he resolved that Arthur Bonnington should first learn the news. Colin Rae, therefore, asked his friend to dine with him in his rooms, where they would be undisturbed, no other guest being present to share or interrupt their conversation, to hear or comment on the disclosure.

The dainty little meal was eaten without mention being made of Colin Rae's project; but presently, when they entered the sitting-room, he felt the moment was at hand when he must speak. The apartment was dimly lighted by a great copper-shaded lamp that cast many shadows on the pale-green walls, with their old Bartolozzi engravings, terra-cotta statuettes, and bronze figures; the wide French windows, framed with the pointed leaves of Virginia creeper, stood open to the balmy night, giving glimpses of Kensington Gardens, with their trees unstirred by a breath and their grassy spaces stretching into purple darkness. The stars were out, but not the moon.

Bonnington dived his hand into a bowl of orange delf filled with *pot-pourri*, which he knew contained cigarettes, and, having found what he wanted, he stretched himself on a low couch covered with white bearskins. Colin Rae sat in a big arm-chair, his pale face well in the shade.

A strange reluctance to speak on the subject uppermost in his mind and an unwanted feeling of sadness overtook him; but, combating these, he said—

"I have something to tell you, Art, that may surprise you."

"Pleasantly? A surprise is never pardonable except when it's agreeable."

"I am going to be married to Hetty Nixley," Colin Rae remarked in as calm a tone as he could assume.

His friend remained silent, his cigarette suspended in mid-air, the end burning like a fiery star in the semi-darkness. "Married?" he said, after a moment that seemed an hour. "Married, and to Hetty Nixley of all girls in the world? You are surely jesting?"

"I was never more serious in my life."

"But, my dear Colin," he exclaimed, sitting upright and bending forward towards his friend, "let me implore you—"

"Don't implore, but congratulate me," replied Rae, speaking from out the shadows that seemed to have gathered round him closer.

"It's surely not too late—"

"Everything is settled by her father and by mine."

"But you don't love her?"

"No; but I don't love anyone else, and I like her in a fashion. Very few marriages are made for love nowadays, and those that are sometimes turn out badly. I daresay we shall agree well enough—all the better, perhaps, because we are not all the world to each other," Rae stated, defending himself.

"What you say may hold good concerning other men," answered Bonnington in a grave voice, "but you are not as they are. To the majority of mankind it makes little difference what kind of wife they marry, and whether they like her or not. But you, who are a dreamer, a romancer, a man with finer senses and more delicate perceptions than the

herd, you should either never marry or marry a woman in whom your whole soul was absorbed."

"Such a one might never cross my path," Colin Rae replied wearily.

"Wait for her, it will be worth living for; there's something inspiring in hope, especially to such a temperament as yours; but don't forestall her, for life with all its infinite expectations and glorious possibilities will then end for you; and if she comes you will have the misery of knowing she arrives too late, for the love you would fain give her will belong to another."

"What nonsense we talk, Art!" remarked Colin, uneasily. "The marriage is fully arranged, and, even if I would, there's no backing out of it now."

"What part have you acted in this affair that concerns you most?"

"Very little, I confess," admitted Colin.

"Oh, my friend!"

"Did you never find relief in having a matter of great importance taken out of your hands and regulated by another?"

"I can't say I have," answered Bonnington.

"I have. It's like seeing one's pathway traced out by another on the great map of life, while you look on with interest, feeling incapable of the effort yourself, and believing what's done is for the best."

"I prefer marking out my own career."

"You have more concern in existence and greater strength of character than I possess," said Rae, in a voice that was not without weariness.

"But tell me how this was brought about, Colin."

"She is an only daughter, and I am an only son. Her father and mine put their heads together, and evolved the idea of our marriage. The lady was then consulted, and found agreeable. I was afterwards informed of the part assigned to me."

"And you accepted it obediently?"

"Not without some hesitation, but my father was equal to the occasion. He declared he was tired of making me an allowance, reminded me I was not self-supporting, and threatened to cut me off with the proverbial shilling if I refused to wed Hetty Nixley, who is an heiress."

"And you gave in?"

"Certainly. If I didn't wed her, and my father kept his word, I must starve. When we're married, the old man settles a handsome sum on me for life, beyond all power of changing his mind; and then Hetty's fortune, with this, will enable us to live as we like."

"But you don't marry her for her money, Colin?"

"Certainly not. I hardly know the value of money, and set no store by it; but, still, it gives one independence, comfort, consideration, stands between one and the rough winds of this rude world, secures peace of mind and permits liberty of action. Besides, I thought I owed my father something. He had set his mind on my being a barrister, and I became one; but I have only had one brief, and am likely never to have another."

"The law is not your line. You should have been a painter, a writer, a poet—something that requires imagination, perception, inspiration."

"Professions that mean vagabondage to him. When I'm married I shall be able to follow my own desires and become whatever I please."

"Scarcely, old man, if Hetty Nixley will be your wife."

"What do you mean?" asked Colin, surprisedly.

"That she will be certain to have her own way in all things, or else lead you a terrible life."

"How do you know?"

"Know? Why, look at the girl's straight, heavy brows, her firm, determined lips, her rough red hair, and round, fiery eyes. She has a hot temper, a strong will, and a jealous mind. Consider, my friend, what you are about in marrying her. It's not yet too late to change."

"You are not hopeful of my future, Art," Colin Rae said, striving to laugh, but failing in the attempt.

"My dear Colin, she's not the woman to suit you. A gentle, loving girl who would worship you, believe in you, die rather than give you pain, is the wife you want."

"We seldom get what we want," replied Colin, with a scarcely suppressed sigh. "Hetty Nixley is my fate, which I have already accepted, be it for good or for evil. No doubt, we shall lead a pleasant jog-trot kind of existence, and come to understand and forbear with each other in a short time; and I suppose, after all, tolerance is the secret of happiness in married life."

"My dear Colin," Arthur Bonnington said, coming to where his friend sat and placing one hand on his shoulder as he leant over him, "no man can help liking you, no woman can help loving you; may you be as happy as I desire and as you deserve."

Within a month from the date of this conversation, Hetty Nixley and Colin Rae were made man and wife in St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge. The bride, tall and shapely, her fair cheeks flushing scarlet, her auburn hair crowned with orange-blossoms, looked radiantly happy; the bridegroom, well-built and slight, his face pale and grave, seemed nervous and ill at ease. He had protested against the pomp and parade of the ceremony, the half-dozen bridesmaids, choral service, train of carriages, crowds of friends, and throngs of strangers; but Hetty insisted on being married with all the show possible, and he had been obliged to submit. The lunch following, with its interminable speeches, prosy congratulations, and long-winded wishes, was more intolerable still, and it was some relief when they started *en route* for their honeymoon of three months, which were to be spent in Italy.

Long before that time expired it was evident to Colin Rae his wife loved him ardently; but it was likewise plain to him her affection was not calculated to make life's way a pleasant path for either of them.

As Colin was not demonstrative by temperament, she reproached him with coldness, unable to see his nature led him to shrink from exhibiting his feelings. Jealous of his absence if it extended over a few minutes, she continually summoned him from the smoking-rooms of the hotels at which they stayed, joined him after dinner if he lingered with the men he met, and complained if he ventured out alone by day or by night. Once, when they encountered some old friends in Rome, they did their sight-seeing in common, and it was arranged they should go together to Naples; but on the morning of the proposed journey Hetty declared herself too ill to travel, and when their friends had departed assured her husband her indisposition was merely assumed in order to get rid of them.

Their tastes, like their dispositions, were far asunder as the poles, and never likely to come closer. Historic monuments and classic ruins that interested and delighted him were to her so much rubbish; churches and palaces, the wonder of ages, the embodiment of beauty, she found merely damp and cold; picture galleries were for her places of unbroken dreariness, and scenery fatigued her beyond measure. What she most enjoyed during her stay abroad was a masked ball at Rome, a horse-race at Naples, and the gambling-tables at Monte Carlo. Not satisfied with taking pleasure in these, it displeased her that Colin did not feel interested in them likewise, and she resented his divergence of taste as a personal slight.

In all ways and all things he was indulgent, tolerant, and kind. No reproachful words ever came from his lips at her impatience, no rebuke for her unreasoning jealousy, no protest against her caprices. She was a woman, and above all women, his wife, and as such he felt it his duty to treat her with gentleness, defer to her wishes, humour her moods—not thinking he merely fed her selfishness, vanity, and egotism, but trusting his forbearance would presently teach her restraint, consideration, courtesy.

That she loved him was much, but it scarcely compensated for the pain and humiliation her aggressiveness, want of tact, and violent temper hourly, and sometimes all unconsciously, inflicted on his impressionable nature and sensitive disposition. The three months he had spent in her company seemed as three years; but yet never by look, sign, or word did he betray the disappointment he felt, the misery he feared.

On their homeward way they stayed in Paris some weeks, that she might consult Monsieur Worth on the gowns which she hoped would presently astound and make envious the women of her set. One morning on coming down to breakfast in their private sitting-room she found a letter from her father and from a girl who had been her bridesmaid. On her husband's plate was a square, well-filled envelope, directed in a man's writing and bearing the London postmark. Colin had not yet entered, and she took his letter in her hand as if she would master the contents by some occult purpose, then held it between her eyes and the light, while knowing it was impossible for her to read a line it contained. As she caught the sound of his footsteps, she hastily laid it down before further temptation assailed her, and took her place at the table. When she had poured out the coffee she opened her letters, and while pretending to read them carefully watched him as he glanced over his letter and smiled

from time to time. It was written by Arthur Bonnington, and ran as follows—

"DEAR OLD COLIN,—For three months I have not written to you, but now, as I hear you are staying in Paris previous to your return, I write a line to hope you are very well and very happy. By this time you have no doubt settled down comfortably as a married man, and I am prepared to hear all my fears regarding your wife's temper and jealousy were perfectly baseless. After all, they were merely founded on the colour of her hair, which I pronounced red, but which you will henceforth proclaim auburn; and the light in her eyes, that became flame-hued when anything ruffled the placid surface of her mind. I am quite willing, nay, anxious, to be convinced I was mistaken, prejudiced against one whom I feared would interrupt our old standing friendship; so forgive me, and bear no malice in your heart against me. Nothing of any importance has happened during your absence: perhaps you will think this strange, and marvel at the world continuing its old routine whilst matters of the greatest concern befall yourself. I go to the Temple every morning, with vague hopes of being entrusted with a brief, hopes that set with every sun and rise anew next day. The afternoon sees me at my club, reading newspapers that don't in the least interest me, meeting men for whom I don't care a rap. Sometimes I go out to dinner, sometimes to the play, and then my little life is rounded by a sleep. I frequently think I must follow your example and plunge into matrimony, if only for the sake of experience. I shall wait and take your advice, though you did not pay me the compliment of taking mine—happily, I hope, for yourself. I look forward to seeing you very soon, and having a long chat. Good-bye, old man.—Always your friend,
"ARTHUR BONNINGTON."

When Colin Rae laid down his letter, he encountered two fiery eyes fixed on him unflinchingly.

"What news?" his wife asked, in a harsh, dry voice, that grated painfully on his ears.

"Nothing in particular," he said quietly.

"And yet it was sufficient to amuse you. I saw you laughing," she remarked, her cheeks becoming scarlet.

"Yes; it's from Arthur Bonnington."

"Let me see it," she exclaimed quickly, holding out her hand with an imperious gesture.

"Hetty?" he said, calmly and reproachfully, recognising in her eyes the flame-like light of which Bonnington had spoken.

"Let me read that letter," she cried out, pointing to it once more.

"Certainly not," he replied in the same placid tones.

"Why?" she almost screamed.

"Because it was written for me alone."

"And your wife is not, I suppose, to share your amusements, to share your secrets, to have the privilege of this man you call your friend," she cried, her voice growing louder, and louder, hot tears of passion and vexation burning on her eyelids.

"Control yourself, the servants will overhear you," he said quietly.

"What do I care for the servants? I will see what secrets that letter holds," she answered, her excitement increasing.

"It contains no secrets," he replied, folding it up and placing it in his breast-pocket.

"Then why do you refuse to let me see it?"

"For the reason I stated."

"I don't believe you."

"Hetty!" he called out, hurt beyond measure at her words.

"I don't. How do I know what kind of life you led before your marriage? But this man Bonnington, whom I never liked, and whom I now hate, does, and sends you news your wife may not see—ready, no doubt, to bring you back to your former ways."

"This is untrue and unjust. My past contains nothing that could bring you or me pain or shame."

"You say so; but I might have known that in marrying a man like you—silent, reserved, and grave—I should be deceived. Why was I ever so blind as to believe in you?" she shouted, with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes, her bosom heaving, her breath coming quick and short.

"You agitate yourself about nothing; pray be sensible," he replied, his face becoming paler, the expression of his dark eyes growing sadder.

"How can you expect me to be sensible, when I have made a fool of myself by marrying a man who refuses me the slightest request I make—who has secrets I may not share? What will my poor dear father say when he learns my fate?"

"I have never refused a request of yours before, Hetty," he said, keeping his sorely-tried patience; "I have no secrets from you."

"You have, and I know you hate and despise me."

"You know nothing of the kind: remember, your passion forces you to say things of which you will repent in an hour," he remarked, striving to calm her.

"No; I have said nothing which I need repent. I know you were mean enough to marry me for my fortune," she hissed, stretching across the table.

Colin Rae rose from his place. "I have never touched a penny of your money, and I never will," he said gravely and firmly.

"No, you despise me too much. Say what is in your mind; you detest me—there's no use of striving to conceal it any longer. Was there ever a woman in the world so duped as I have been, so miserable as I am?" she cried, choking with passion, her neck and cheeks and forehead one blaze of scarlet, her eyes wild and brilliant, her frame quivering.

[Continued on page 657.]

"Hetty, Hetty!" he said, with something of pity as well as pain in his voice.

"Don't speak to me. Don't come near me. I will never see or speak to you again," she exclaimed, rushing out of the room and slamming the door behind her.

Colin Rae walked to the window and looked out. The sky was covered with grey clouds, the street was dark, and a thin drizzling rain had begun to fall. The aspect outside was dull, and harmonised with the sense of misery that had fallen on his life. For months he had done everything in his power to persuade himself he had not made a fatal and life-long mistake in marrying his wife, to ward off the depression which again and again had threatened him, to believe after all they might lead an harmonious if not a happy existence. But now he saw how impossible was the fulfilment of such a hope; how irrecoverable a step he had taken, how bleak and bitter the future that awaited him. She who should be the nearest and dearest of God's creatures had wilfully and wantonly inflicted such pain on him as he had never previously suffered; her words had wounded deeply, and would rankle for many a day, and would leave a scar for ever. His humiliation was greater because there was some truth in the statement that he had married for money, and he loathed himself as he had never done before. And above and beyond all came the thought that he was bound body and soul to his wife, liable to bear the subtle tortures, the bitter insults she might by her tactless manner or in her violent tempers choose to inflict.

His heart sank, for life and its joyous hours, its bright sunshine and careless happiness, seemed at an end, and only an existence fretted by domestic broils and constant anxieties stretched before him. Surely death would now be a relief. He went into the streets and walked onwards in the drizzling rain, careless where he turned, seeing nothing that he passed, his wife's harsh voice ringing in his ears, her words stinging him like the stripes of steel-thonged whips. Dazed and weary, he journeyed forward until he found himself close by the Louvre, which he mechanically entered by the Pavillon Sully, and walked through suites of vast rooms lined with pictures. But Murillo, Paul Veronese, Da Vinci, and Correggio failed for the first time in his life to give him pleasure, and he looked on them now as with the eyes of another man; so much do all men depend on their inner mood for the enjoyment of things surrounding them.

He passed little crowds of sightseers, knots of workmen out of employ, who sought shelter in the building, and artists engaged in copying, until, stepping into the deep embrasure of a window, he looked across the grey Pont Neuf towards the dark towers of Notre Dame rising against the threatening sky. Then a desire for air and freedom took possession of him, and once more he was in the streets, not caring where he went, walking rapidly, striving to make his body keep pace with his thoughts.

Suddenly he came to a square where a number of idlers stood silent and with scared faces, their eyes fixed as if fascinated upon a scaffold on which the sharp steel of the guillotine glistened in the wet. But a few hours previously it had severed a human head from its body, and sent a soul rushing, blind, horror-stricken, and darkened, into another world. Such sights appealed to the morbid side of Colin Rae's character, and he gazed at the terrible instrument with awe and interest, his vivid imagination picturing the last moments of the condemned, seeing him start and grow pale as he gazed upon the fearful knife, watching him take his last look at earth and sky before the bandage covered his eyes, noting the quivering of his limbs as he was led forward, and heeding the frightful shudder passing through him as his bared neck and haggard face protruded through the lunette. What must the victim's thoughts have been of his past life, of those who had loved or hated him, of the crime which had brought him to death? And what were his hopes or fears of the future, if he believed in such: what his terror at the violent severance of trunk and head? In fancy strong as reality, Colin saw the distorted face drop into the basket, the blood streaming hot and thick from the neck, with its veins and sinews distended and gaping; and he turned away from the Place de Grève with a feeling of physical illness he had never experienced before.

It was late in the afternoon when he returned to his hotel soaked with wet and weary. Hetty was absent from the sitting-room, nor on going to the bed-room did he find her there. He changed his clothes and, returning, made inquiries concerning her from the man who was laying the dinner, and heard she had left the hotel soon after he had gone out, not leaving word when she would return. He had no doubt she was shopping, and sitting down in a big arm-chair before the wood fire, he, being worn out by exercise and anxiety, soon fell into a profound sleep.

His slumber, however, was not untroubled by dreams, for the weight that had depressed him all day now took tangible shape, and he believed himself the perpetrator of some horrible crime. What its nature was, how or where it had happened, he could not say; he only knew he was fleeing from justice and was liable to death. His flight, however, was unavailing; the harsh, shrill voice of his wife pursued him; he was captured by a vast crowd that denounced him, and hurried him to the scaffold. There he stood, alone and unbefriended, upon this black and ghastly gibbet under a dark and ominous sky. No light in the clouds, heavy rain falling on him like the visible vengeance of Heaven, no mercy in the heart of his executioner, no pity in the faces of the dense, surging mob that glared at him with hungry eyes, longing for his death, waiting for the moment when the steel should flash and the warm blood come dripping from the dismembered and ghastly trunk.

Perspiration oozed from every pore of his body, his limbs trembled, and a groan escaped his lips. His hands were bound: with one wild look he bade farewell for ever to the world he never more should see, to the heavens hidden by angry clouds, and then came darkness. With slow

and measured pace he was led to the block, bowed his head, heard the creaking of the machine as the knife descended lower and lower between the grooved posts, then felt the cold touch of the murderous steel upon his neck, and all was over.

On going to her bed-room that morning Hetty gave way to a passionate storm of tears and choking sobs. She had bolted the door that her husband might not be able to enter when he came to sue for pardon and seek for peace, for she felt quite certain he would come, and every now and then suspended the outbursts of her grief to listen for his approaching footsteps. Presently she unlocked the door, resolving to admit him and listen to his apologies. He would see her suffering from the misery he had brought on her, kneel at her feet and beg for forgiveness which she would not grant, neither should she speak to him for many days. An hour passed, her passion had almost exhausted itself though she had striven to prolong it, and yet Colin had not sought her. This was strange, and, what was more, disappointing. It could scarcely be possible that he did not regret the scene at the breakfast-table, and yet he had not expressed his sorrow.

She listened, but there was no sound; she flung the door open, but he did not come, and after a few minutes' deliberation she entered the sitting-room, reproach, suffering, and indignation expressed in her eyes and in her bearing; but Colin was not there. After waiting half an hour, she summoned a servant, and, inquiring for him, learnt that Colin had gone out soon after breakfast. Then, as she sat in an alcove of the window, looking at the grey sky and drenching rain, a reaction set in, and she admitted that she had been much to blame. Her jealousy had made her unreasoning, her temper had hurried her to speak hard words and express unjust suspicions, which it must be bitter for him to bear. It was she who must sue for pardon, and she wondered if he would forgive her.

Then came recollections of his unfailing kindness, and, what was more, his exceeding thoughtfulness. She must have frequently tried his endurance, but he treated her with unvarying gentleness. She recalled a thousand acts that showed his care and affection: the good humour he had betrayed in answering her complainings, the tact with which he had met her thoughtless words and bitter speeches. Could it be that his forbearance had reached its limit, that his patience was exhausted? She loved him with all the warmth and the wilfulness of her nature, and his absence, especially after the scene of the morning, made her miserable. She could not bear the solitude and silence, the reproach of her conscience, the feeling of impending woe that gradually seized upon her. She would go out and seek him, humbly ask his pardon, confess herself in the wrong, promise never more to offend, and then he would surely forgive her, for he was generous, and could not bear to see her suffer.

She drove to the Luxembourg and the Louvre, hoping and expecting she would find him before the pictures he loved so well; but he was not in the galleries: then to the Bibliothèque; but again she was disappointed. With every moment her vague fears and threatening terrors increased, as did likewise her desire to see him, and, dismissing her carriage, she walked in the dismal rain up and down the boulevards, avenues, and streets, looking for him everywhere, her heart beating wildly, her clothes drenched, her limbs aching from fatigue. At last, miserable and weary, she returned to the hotel, and on opening the sitting-room door saw him sleeping in a chair by the fire.

An exclamation of joy and gratitude rose to her lips; but she repressed it, lest it might disturb him. She stood watching him, with a sense of pride and affection, thinking how handsome he was, how noble-looking, how good, sighing as she remarked the pallor of his face and its pained expression, which were due to her temper, and she resolved never more to wound him: she would die first.

She stole gently forward and stood beside him. His head was thrown back, a low moan escaped him, and, bending down, she pressed her cold lips against his throat. Then a shudder passed through his frame, something invisible fluttered in escaping from his mouth, and he was perfectly still.

She knelt beside him, watching him until he should awake, but, growing impatient, spoke to him in a low, subdued voice. "Colin, forgive me and forget my wicked words, for I love you so much that from my love springs jealousy, and I cannot bear that anyone should come near you in word, thought, or deed but myself. Speak, dear, and say I am pardoned."

No response came, no movement was perceptible, and she supposed he had not heard her. She twined her fingers in his dark hair, and as she touched his forehead she noticed how cold and clammy it was. Still kneeling, she laid her head upon his breast. "Colin, if you don't forgive me I shall be the most miserable woman in the world," she said, with a sob in her throat. "Don't you hear me, dear?"

Again, no answer: and then a terrible thought flashed on her, that though her head was laid against his breast she had not heard his heart beat. But setting aside this idea as a wild and terrible fancy, she called him again in a louder tone, and took the hand hanging over the arm-chair in her own. It was limp and cold, and fell from her grasp with a heavy, lifeless motion. Alarmed to the brink of madness, keeping at bay the fearful conviction that forced itself upon her and drove her to distraction, she bent her head above the slightly-opened mouth. No breath came from those still and pallid lips.

"Colin!" she exclaimed, raising him in her arms.

His head fell back limp and nerveless. She pressed him close and closer to her breast. "He's dead," she whispered, and then, raising her voice to a piercing shriek, she burst into the gruesome laughter of hopeless despair.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.

THE DEAD MAN LAUGHED.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE GREEN CARNATION."

The news of his death came upon her as a blow. There could be no doubt of that. She had never anticipated that he would die so soon, while the rose-bushes were all in flower, and the nightingales were awake in the coppice, and the sun had the glow, and the shadows the cool reticence, peculiar to the earlier days of the summer. She had never anticipated that he would die at all while she was alive. It seemed so unlikely. She was such a delicate slip of a snow-white maiden, with the vagueness of the undiscovered country in her great brown eyes, with the trouble of a tragic future in the curving lips of her tremulous, rose-bud mouth. And he had been so strong—so terribly strong. The iron of his great arms might have held up a world, she thought. His voice was the voice of the ruler. In his eyes a threatening command dwelt always. And now he was dead. She had just heard so, and scarcely anyone knew it yet. His mighty frame was stretched out in the room below—the garden-room, where she generally sat at evening; the garden-room to which one sometimes came as evening fell. But she did not think of that immediately. That the world would go on just as usual now all was so changed for her, did not occur to her. The man below had been her husband, and he was dead. She could only think of that at first.

How she had hated him!

He had bought her as the wife he desired. So, surely, he must have once loved her. But he had never shown it. She had feared him terribly that very first day, when they went away together from the church, down the flat, grey road by the almshouses, where the old women stood bobbing in the rain, over the village green haunted by wandering geese, whose feathers were blown the wrong way by the wind that stormy day of their marriage. He must have once desired her. How he had stared at her in the shadow of the shut carriage, while the hoofs of the horses splashed in the puddles of the country road. His eyes never left her. They were slightly bloodshot, and looked excited as they travelled over her face, and his full lips moved under his black moustache. But he said nothing.

How she had hated him!

The morning after their wedding she had tried to escape from him. She slipped out of the great Lord Warden Hotel at Dover in the grey dampness of the dawn when he was sleeping. The sullen sea, which they were to cross presently, roared in her ears, and the sea-gulls cried to her from the foam-flecked pebbles of the steeply curving beach. The hull of a steamer loomed on the ragged horizon, and the rain drove over the shining asphalt ways. Two or three sailors hanging about, with peaked caps drawn down above their wet faces, and hunched shoulders, peered at her as she crept from the hotel, a grain of humanity swept by the whirlwind. How cold it was, and how desolate! In the wind came to her the strangled whistle of an engine, and then she knew she was too late. The train was flashing away as she struggled on against the tempest. She returned to his embrace.

How she had hated him!

And they travelled together. The snow peaks of Switzerland, the green valleys, where the chalets rested on the steep slopes, as if tired, and pausing but for a moment; the blue lakes of Italy; the old, sad cities, with their streets full of the echoes of dead voices: the weary ruins, passively enduring shrill-calling tourists; the vineyards, where life was laughter and was song—she had seen them all with him. She hated them all. Even the flat reaches of the venerable Nile and the rose-gardens of Damascus were loathsome to her. She had watched the flame-blue line of Arabs wind away beneath the flame-blue sky. She had heard the tinkling bells of caravans, and the wild chant of the sailors sweep up from the pallid grey-green mimosa-bushes, and she had only sickened and longed to die. She had only longed to die. And now he lay dead, and she could hear the nightingales beginning to flute. Yet, was she glad?

They had come back to England. People envied her. Women murmured his name as she passed by, murmured it in admiration, while the blood flamed in her cheek at thought that she was his. The great world took her for a while, took her and gave to her only such profound weariness. In the Park,

as her victoria stood against the railings in the hot sun, and the murmur of Society rippled round her beneath the trees, and the queens of Society, and the courtesans who were the unrecognised queens—the sinner *incognita* and the queen *incognita*—passed her by, she sickened again, and thought of the rose-gardens of Damascus and of the flame-blue line of the Arabs, and wondered if the world could give to her nothing, if his shadow must be upon everything, like the shadow of fate brooding black over the pleasure of life. She wondered in a malady of dreaming, and the voices under the trees said she posed, because for a moment she ceased to think of them. Then she drove home as the twilight gathered about the city, and tried to hush it all, in vain. She dreaded the falling of night as children dread the grave.

How she had hated him!

And then a golden thread twined into the web of her tangled young life. One, in the midst of the ignorant and the careless, understood that she was in the prison-house of despair, and stayed awhile outside the grating of her cell to whisper of comfort. The dew fell upon the poor parched flower, and she opened her petals to receive it. But so secretly, always so secretly. Surely no one ever knew. Outside the garden-room in the dusk he came when all was quiet. The jailer was away. He came and came again, and he taught her to see the stars through the grating of her cell, and he told her of the rising of the moon. And, when he came, it seemed to her that the nightingales were always singing.

And now the jailer had gone away for ever. The prison doors were open. She stepped out into the starlight and the moonlight. He lay dead in the room below her. She had not seen him dead; she must go down into that silent place where he lay in silence. She thought only of him. Her small face was very white as she walked softly down the stairs. She saw the merry motes dancing in the cloud of gold-dust that the sun shed obliquely through the leaded lattices of the hall, and she turned her eyes away from them, and wished the sun would go down. With the darkness, her strange constraint of calm might fade away. She longed to feel more natural. She passed through the door very quietly, and closed it behind her, and locked it. He had been laid upon the wide couch where she sat sometimes at eventide alone. A white covering shrouded the great form that her girl's flesh had shuddered at, had shrunk from so often. A ray of dying light glinted where the head was. When she drew back the covering, the ray shone upon the grey, swollen face, into which she gazed for a long while. The upper lip was drawn back from the strong white teeth. The mouth seemed to grin callously. She could fancy that the flown soul of the dead man was laughing somewhere far off, and that the body which, in life, had so often obeyed the spirit, with the weakness of custom still mechanically bowed to its will, still revealed outwardly that which was no longer prisoned within it. Yes, as she looked at the mouth, she felt that the dead man's soul was laughing.

She wondered why, and as she stood wondering, over the smooth shaven lawn, past the sun-dial and the leaping silver of the fountain, one came to the garden-room—the man who understood her, and had striven to comfort her.

He did not know yet. He stole so softly because he believed her husband was living, and not because he knew he was dead.



In the Park, as her victoria stood against the railings in the hot sun.

He stood at the window and whispered her name, and, as he spoke, a rush of joy swelled through her heart. She left the dead face uncovered, and crossed to him.

"Is he gone?" he asked.

"He is gone," she answered. "Kiss me."

He caught her passionately and pressed his lips on hers.

"How I love you!" he murmured. "How I love you!"



"He is gone," she answered. "Kiss me."

As he said the words she turned round from him and looked back into the slowly darkening room.

A strange, horrible fancy seized her.

She thought she heard the dead man laugh.

"When will you give yourself to me?" her lover whispered. "I have waited so long! Come, leave your prison-house. Let the jailer find the cell-door open when he returns, the prisoner escaped."

She answered him—

"He will never return to find me."

He held her closer against his heart.

"You have resolved to dare all, then; to dare all for my sake?"

A wild triumph shone in her white girl's face, a wild triumph thrilled in her sweet girl's voice, as she replied—

"The prison-house has crumbled to the dust. The prisoner is free."

He strained her yielding body in his arms.

"You mean that you will come, that you will leave him to long for you? You will forsake him? I love you!"

But she shrank from him again and trembled. She looked behind her into that still, shadowy room. The warm blood in her young body seemed to freeze. Surely she heard the dead man laugh again in the gathering darkness!

"You will leave him? You will come?"

"There is no need," she said.

He kept her in his arms. His kisses never left her face. He whispered—

"Why?"

"He is dead."

He loosened his arms from about her. His mouth left hers.

She pointed backward into the room which was now quite dark. "He is there, lying dead. And you love me and I am free."

She lifted her face to his, and her eyes were full of happy tears. But he looked at her and muttered a curse between his teeth. The

love died from his face and left it hard, and wild with impotent disappointment and despair.

Then he turned away. He turned away and went out into the twilight, across the smooth-shaven lawn, past the sun-dial and the leaping silver of the fountain, and beyond—into the night.

He had been the dead man's lifelong enemy. He had been close upon his revenge, and now the soul he hated had passed beyond his power to hurt. He could never wrong him through all the years. Why should he stay?

She sank down by the window without a cry. She could not understand.

And, in the silence and the close darkness, the dead man laughed.

A VISION OF ARCADY.

This is the first poem in Mr. Justin Huntly McCarthy's "Songs for Cecilia," and is dated Oct. 29, 1893. It was apparently the first time Mr. McCarthy saw Miss Loftus, whom he married Aug. 29, 1894.

Through a fever of painted faces,
A revel of flesh,
Through flutter of lifted laces
And strident thresh
Of a music, barbarous, loud,
Through a leering, laughing crowd,
Wanders a wonderful thing,
A girl with the grace of Spring.

A beautiful maiden blossom,
A girl like a rose,
As pale as the pale flower's bosom,
As pure as its snows.
Dark are her tresses; her eyes
Candid and blue as the skies;
How from Arcadia beguiled
Wanders this wonderful child?

Her face, with its careless sweetness,
Her ribbon-bound hair,
Her dress with its simple neatness,
Her indolent air,
Calm in that clamorous space,
Seem out of tune, out of place
As if some nymph of the glade
Appeared at a masquerade.

She seems in that throng, she only,
As free as a faun
In the still green forest, as lonely
And cool as the dawn
Breathing on feverish eyes,
When a night of revel dies,
And longings for streams and trees
Arise with the rising breeze.



THE SISTERS LEVEY.

Photo by Lafayette, Dublin.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.

KISMET.

BY WALTER RAMAL.

The man in the cart, when he reached the top of the long hill up which the old mare had been steadily plodding, was rejoiced to spy, against the whiteness of the road beyond, the figure of a man walking. For, although he was of a taciturn disposition, and loved not companionship, yet on this night he felt lonely; at times, even, he had peered timorously between the trees that overshadowed the roadway, and had started in affright when the ring of the hoofs on the frozen ground had roused some bird from sleep, and the sound of its swift flight could be heard, growing gradually fainter, till hushed in the distance. Uncanny stories had flocked up from forgotten stores of memory, and, with the creeping of his flesh, haunting fancies had come that grim shapes were gathering behind him. With a shudder at the dread thought, he had pulled the collar of his heavy coat about his ears, and so had sat, fearful to breathe.

But now, as he leisurely drove down the steady decline, the sight of the lonely figure in the distance restored his forgotten courage; defiantly he hummed under his breath a song brimming over with blasphemy against all midnight loiterers other than those of flesh, to which song the mare put back her ears, and hearkened in astonishment.

As he drew slowly nearer to the traveller, all sudden a great, deep voice came leaping through the cold night air, roaring out the swinging chorus of some song of the sea; the man in the cart stopped dead in his crooning, and listened in amazement to the intense happiness that rang in every note. The music in the song seemed to run in his blood—a shudder shook him from head to foot. The song ceased so suddenly as it had begun; the traveller had heard the noise of the approaching cart, and was now waiting at the side of the road till it should come up with him.

The driver pulled up near at hand, and eyed the stranger with some curiosity; the mare also turned her head to gaze wonderingly at him for a moment, then shook herself, till every bit of metal on her harness rang again. The stranger startled the man in the cart when he spoke, so intent was he in his stare.

"How far might it be to Barrowmere?" inquired the man on foot.

"Nigh on seven mile," replied the driver, with wonder in his brain at a man possessing the bravery to walk alone at midnight through the still country lanes.

"Thanks," said the stranger shortly, in a bluff, hearty voice, then turned as if to continue his tramp.

The driver watched him a few paces. "He's a seaman," he muttered to himself, "and I don't make no doubt but he's going home," after which reflection he was about to gather up the reins to continue his interrupted journey, when his whole face lit up at the brilliant charitable idea that, as he was going on the same course as the other, he should offer him a lift in the cart. His plump cheeks grew hot with virtuous pride as he shouted, "Hi! was it Barrowmere ye said?"

The man wheeled round smartly. "Barrowmere it was!" he sang out in answer.

"I be going to Barrowmere," said the driver; "will ye climb up behind?"

The stranger with the joyous voice strode back, and swung himself into the cart with a muscular jerk.

"P'raps ye will sit there," said the driver, pointing with the butt of his whip to a canvas-wrapt box at the bottom of the cart.

There the stranger sat himself down.

A peculiar smile sped over the driver's face as he shook the reins and drove on without another word.

By degrees he grew morose and sulky. He blamed the traveller for accepting his hospitable offer.

The stranger, who was muffled to the chin in a thick pea-jacket, made a vain attempt to converse with the driver, but, finding him unwilling and witless, he turned his attention to his more pleasant thoughts. His sun-browned face beamed at the thought of the meeting with his wife soon to come about, he chuckled audibly as he imagined her surprised delight, and he rubbed his hands for the twentieth time when the full subtlety of his little joke in not letting her know the day of his return was again forced upon him.

The full moon flooded the fields with light, making them appear even colder than in reality they were; a very slight fall of snow and a sharp frost had clothed the trees and hedges in a shimmering glory of sparkling white. Not a sound was in the air save the buzz of the cart's wheels, the steady beat of the hoofs, and an occasional shuddering snort from the mare. The cold was severe, at times compelling both men to beat their arms upon their bodies to restore the running of their blood.

Maybe it was the intense silence, maybe the lonely hour of the night, that oppressed the spirits; but there crept over the man of the sea, who aforetime had been so rollicking in humour, a stern sobriety, a vague presage of impending disaster, an unreasonable mistrust of his former jollity, so that he sat dumb and perplexed on his seat in the cart, watching the sharp-drawn shadows of the trees upon the white road flit silently by, eyeing with stealthy suspicion the burly, bowed body of the driver, and the while ardently desiring the eager arms of his wife.

The traveller got upon his feet in the cart and peered over the driver's shoulder. He could see, down in the hollow, the first outlying cottage of

the village, and the blood surged up in his body as one by one the well-remembered landmarks of home came into view.

His heart yearned for the shelter of his house, for the kiss of the loved woman: he almost sobbed when he thought of the mate to his little craft, who knew no friend in the world to give him welcome.

The driver looked back over his shoulder at the stranger, and muttered huskily, "That be Barrowmere yonder."

The stranger heeded him not, but at the instant the notion came into his head that he would get down from the cart and travel the remainder of the journey on foot; he would not that the surly man should see his glad meeting with his wife, so he tapped the driver on the shoulder. The man turned sulkily; he was bidden to pull up, and obeyed with sullen tardiness. The seaman leaped out at the back, tossed a coin to the man, who pocketed it with a surly nod of thanks and drove on again; a peculiar smile spread over his features as he muttered to some thing between the ears of the old mare.

"I do hope, now, he found it easy."

And the man of the sea was trudging slowly along the country lane towards his home; he was rejoiced at being free from his unfriendly companion; his good spirits began to return to him, when, on a sudden, the piteous, wailing howl of a dog struck upon his ears—terror seized upon him for a moment, so that he gasped for breath and trembled as he walked. Bitterly he cursed the land; he vowed that he would carry his wife away to the great sea and never touch land again.

With almost unwilling footstep, he approached the bend in the road whence his cottage would come into view; every tiny twig in the hedge-rows was white-gleaming, not a cloud obscured the living heavens, only the pitiless, cold stare of the moon upon all and the silence of death. It ate into the heart of the man as he walked; he feared greatly, though he knew not why nor what manner of thing he feared. With bated breath, he turned the corner; there lay his home, peaceful under the white moonlight; but his surprise was great at seeing the cart he had journeyed in at a standstill before the little rustic gate. The man, apparently, had entered the house, for the horse was standing with hanging head, its reins tied to the gate-post, waiting its driver. He walked quietly towards the house, with that strange misgiving at his heart. When he reached it, he feared to enter. He looked into the cart; the box he had used as a seat had gone. He made a weak attempt to laugh his fears down, but failed miserably.

The windows facing the roadway were in pitchy darkness; not a sign was there that life was within. The seaman crept with muffled footsteps to the back of the house, and again sounded the chilling howl of a dog. He leant over the rough wooden rail and called softly. The dog—his dog—whined joyously, straining at its chain to welcome its master.

He leapt over the low fence; the idea crossed his mind that he was straying round his own house as a thief in the night. He paused for a moment, perplexed at the sudden beam of light which dazzled his eyes. He glanced up to discover whence it came; the curtains had been drawn across one of the windows, but had not met, thus leaving a narrow space through which the bright rays of light were streaming out upon the night from within—it was the window of his bedroom.

With fitful breath he crept over to the dog, and fondled it for a while, but still keeping his eyes fixed upon that lonely beam of light. The dog licked its master's hand in unrestrained joy at his return.

And there came into the man's mind a fervent desire to look in through that window. He struggled with himself to restrain the impulse, and to knock boldly at the door, but his wild forebodings and fears of unknown evil conquered him. He looked round for some means by which he might reach the window.

A large tree grew a few yards from the house, a bough of which jutted out towards the window; he remembered that, when he had lain awake on summer nights gone by, he had heard it tapping against the pane. With reluctant steps, he crawled to the tree, clasped a projecting knot, and began to climb the weather-worn trunk. With much labour he scrambled on till at last he reached the bough that ran out towards the house. His hands were numb with the frost and cold. Slowly he crept on, trembling and panting, deadly fearful but smiling at his fears. One last painful effort, and he lay on the branch, with his face toward the window, the light beaming out into his blue eyes.

Gradually he grew accustomed to the glare; he saw plainly into the room.

He saw the bed shrouded in a white sheet; he saw the mother of his wife, kneeling at its head, bend over and gently lift the sheet; he saw the still, pallid face of his dead wife; he saw the driver of the cart pass across the rift between the curtains, carrying the coffin on which he had sat in his joyous ride to his home. A great rush of blood blinded his eyes and sang in his ears; he clawed madly at the bough of the tree with his stiff fingers. As he swung in the air, his breath shook him, his teeth chattered and bit into his tongue. He heard with strange distinctness the whispering voices of the night, the stealthy movements in the little room; he saw all things as he stared.

Gradually his clutching fingers relaxed; the whole firmament seemed to reel. In his struggling flight through the air, his skull struck and cracked against a bossy branch; his body turned limply, and fell with a dead thud, broken and lifeless, upon the turf beneath.

The dog crawled nearer, shivering and dismayed; it licked the bloody hand of its master, then threw up its head to give tongue to a long-drawn howl of terror.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.



"Of course, I admit it isn't plagiarism," said Carter Esplan savagely; "it's fate, it's the devil, but is it the less irritating on that account? No, no!" And he ran his hand through his hair till it stood on end. He shook with febrile excitement, a red spot burnt on either cheek, and his bitten lip quivered. "Confound Burford, and his parents, and his ancestors! The tools to him that can handle them," he added, after a pause, during which his friend Vincent curiously considered him.

"It's your own fault, my dear wild man," said he; "you are too lazy. Besides, remember these things—these notions, motives—are in the air. Originality is only the art of catching early worms. Why don't you do the things as soon as you invent them?"

"Now you talk like a bourgeois, like a commercial traveller," returned Esplan angrily. "Why doesn't an apple-tree yield apples when the blossoms are fertilised? Why wait for summer, and the influences of wind and sky? Why don't live chickens burst new-laid eggs? Shall parturition tread sudden on conception? Didn't the mountain labour to bring forth a mouse? and shall—"

"Your works of genius not require a portion of the eternity to which they are destined?"

"Stuff!" snarled Esplan; "but you know my method. I catch the suggestion, the floating thistle-down of thought, the title, maybe; and then I leave it, perhaps without a note, to the brain, to the subliminal consciousness, the subconscious self. The story grows in the dark of the inner perpetual sleepless soul. It may be rejected by the artistic tribunal sitting there, it may be bidden to stand aside. I, the outer I, the husk-case of heredities, know nothing of it, but one day I take the pen and the hand writes it. This is the automatism of art, and I—I am nothing, the last only of the concealed individualities within me. Perhaps a dumb ancestor attains speech, and yet the Complex Ego Esplan must be anticipated in this way."

He rose and paced the lonely club smoking-room with irregular steps. His nerves were evidently quivering, his brain was wild. But Vincent, who was a physician, saw deeper. For Esplan's speech was jerky, at times he missed the right word—the locomotor centres were not under control.

"What of morphine?" he thought. "I wonder if he's at it again, and is to-day without his quantum." But Esplan burst out once more.

"I should not care so much if Burford did them well, but he doesn't know how to write a story. Look at this last thing of mine—of his. I saw it leaping and alive; it ran and sang, a very Mænad; it had red blood. With him it wasn't even born dead; it squeaks puppetry, and leaks sawdust, and moves like a lay figure, and smells of most manifest manufacture. But I can't do it now. He has spoilt it for ever. It's the third time. Curse him, and my luck! I work when I must."

"Your calling is very serious to you," said Vincent lazily. "After all, what does it matter? What are stories? Are they not opiates for cowards' lives? I would rather invent some little instrument, or build a plank bridge across a muddy stream, than write the best of them."

Esplan turned on him.

"Well, well," he almost shouted; "the man who

invented chloroform was great, and the makers of it are useful. Call stories chloral, morphia, bromides, if you will, but we give ease."

"When it might be better to use blisters."

"Rot!" answered Esplan rudely. "In any case, your talk is idle. I am I, and writers are writers—small, if you will, but a result and a force. Give me a rest. Don't talk ideal poppycock!"

He ordered liqueur brandy. After drinking it, his aspect changed a little, and he smiled.

"Perhaps it won't occur again. If it does, I shall feel that Burford is very much in my way. I shall have to—"

"Remove him?" asked Vincent.

"No, but work quicker. I have something to write soon. It would just suit him to spoil."

The talk changed, and soon afterwards the friends parted. Esplan went to his chambers in Bloomsbury. He paced his sitting-room idly for a few minutes, but after a while he began to feel the impulse in his brain; his fingers itched, the semi-automatic mood came on. He sat down and wrote, at first slowly, then quicker, and at last furiously.

It was three in the afternoon when he began work. At ten o'clock



"Don't talk ideal poppycock!"

he was still at his desk, and the big table on which it stood was strewn with tobacco-ashes and many pipes. His hair again stood on end, for at intervals he ran his damp hands through it. His eyes altered like opals; at times they sparkled and almost blazed, and then grew dim. He changed at each sentence; he mouthed his written talk audibly; each thought was reflected in his pale, mobile face. He laughed and then groaned; at the crisis tears ran down and blurred the already indecipherable script. But at eleven he rose, stiff in every limb, and staggering. With difficulty, he picked the unpaged leaves from the floor, and sorted them in due order. He fell into his chair.

"It's good, it's good!" he said, chuckling. "What a queer devil I am! My dumb ancestors pipe oddly in me. It's strange, devilish strange; man's but a mouth-piece, and crazy at that. How long has this last thing been hatching? The story is old, yet new. Gibbon shall have it. It will just suit him. Little beast, little horror, little hog, with a divine gold ring of appreciation in his grubbing snout."

He drank half a tumbler of whisky, and tumbled into bed. His mind ran riot.

"My ego's a bit fissured," he said. "I ought to be careful."

And ere he fell asleep he talked conscious nonsense. Incongruous ideas linked themselves together; he sneered at his brain's folly, and yet he was afraid. He used morphine at last in such a big dose that it touched the optic centre and subjective lightnings flashed in his dark room. He dreamed of an "At Home," where he met big, brutal Burford wearing a great diamond in his shirt-front.

"Bought by my conveyed thoughts," he said. But looking down he perceived that he had yet a greater jewel of his own, and soon his soul melted in the contemplation of its rays, till his consciousness was dissipated by a divine absorption into the very Nirvana of Light.

When he woke the next day it was already late in the afternoon. He was overcome by yesterday's labour, and, though much less irritable, he walked feebly. The trouble of posting his story to Gibbon seemed almost too much for him, but he sent it, and took a cab to his club, where he sat almost comatose for many hours.

Two days afterwards, he received a note from the editor, returning his story. It was good, but—

"Burford sent me a tale with the same motive weeks ago, and I accepted it."

Esplan smashed his thin white hand on his mantelpiece, and made it bleed. That night he got drunk on champagne, and the brilliant wine seemed to nip and bite and twist every nerve and brain-cell. His irritability grew so extreme that he lay in wait for subtle, unconceived insults, and meditated morbidly on the aspect of innocent strangers. He gave the waiter double what was necessary, not because it was particularly deserved, but because he felt that the slightest sign of discontent on the waiter's part might lead to an uncontrollable outburst of anger on his own.

Next day, he met Burford in Piccadilly, and cut him dead with a bitter sneer.

"I daren't speak to him—I daren't!" he muttered.

And Burford, who could not quite understand, felt outraged. He himself hated Esplan with the hatred of an outpaced, outstalled rival. He knew his own work lacked the diabolical certainty of Esplan's—it wanted the fine phrase, the right red word of colour, the rush and onward march to due finality, the bitter, exact conviction, the knowledge of humanity that lies in inheritance, the exalted experience that proves received intuitions. He was, he knew, a successful failure, and his ambition was greater even than Esplan's. For he was greedy, grasping, esurient, and his hollowness was obvious even before Esplan proved it with his ringing touch.

"He takes what I have done, and does it better. It's malice, malice," he urged to himself.

And when Esplan placed his last story, and the world remembered only to forget in its white-hot brilliance the cold paste of Burford's Paris jewel, he felt hell surge within him. But he beat his thoughts down for a while, and went on his little, laboured way.

The success of this story and Burford's bitter eclipse helped Esplan greatly, and he might have got saner if other influences working for misery in his life had not hurt him. For a certain woman died, one whom none knew he knew, and he clung to morphine, which, in its increase, helped to throw him later on. It works as one who builds a dam higher and higher yet against the rising waters, and the crash must come.

And at last it did come, for Burford had two stories, better far than his usual work, in a magazine that Esplan almost looked on as his own. They were on Esplan's very motives, he had them almost ready to write. The sting of this last bitter blow drove him off his tottering balance; he conceived murder, and plotted it brutally, and then subtly, and became dominated by it, till his life was the flower of the insane motive. It altered nothing when a reviewer pointed out the close resemblance between the two men's work, and, exalting Esplan's genius, placed the writer beyond all cavil, the other below all place.

But that drove Burford crazy. It was so bitterly true. He ground his teeth, and, hating his own work, hated worse the man who destroyed his own conceit. He wanted to do harm. How should he do it?

Esplan had long since gone under. He was a homicidal maniac with one man before him. He conceived and wrote schemes. His stories ran to murder. He read and imagined means. At times he was in danger of believing he had already done the deed. One wild day he almost gave himself up for this proleptic death. Thus his imagination burnt and flamed before his conceived path.

"I'll do it, I'll do it," he muttered; and at the club the men talked about him.

"To-morrow," he said, and then he put it off. He must consider the art of it. He left it to burgeon in his fertile brain. And at last, just as he wrote, action, lighted up by strange circumstance, began to loom big before him. Such a murder would wake a vivid world, and be an epoch in crime. If the red earth were convulsed in war, even then would it stay to hear that incredible, true story, and, soliciting deeper knowledge, seek out the method and growth of means and motive. He chuckled audibly in the street, and laughed thin laughter in his room of fleeting visions. At night he walked the lonely squares near at hand, considering eagerly the rush of his own divided thoughts, and, leaning against the railings of the leafy gardens, he saw ghosts in the moon-shadows, and beckoned them to converse. He became a night-bird, and was rarely seen.

"To-morrow," he said at last. To-morrow he would really take the first step. He rubbed his hands and laughed as he pondered near home, in his own lonely square, the finer last details which his imagination multiplied.

"Stay, enough, enough!" he cried to his separate mad mind; "it is already done."

And the shadows were very dark about him. He turned to go home.

Then came immortality to him in strange shape. For it seemed as though his ardent and confined soul burst out of his narrow brain and sparkled marvellously. Lights showered about him, and from a rose sky lightnings flashed, and he heard awful thunder. The heavens opened in a white blaze, and he saw unimaginable things. He reeled, put his hand to his stricken head, and fell heavily in a pool of his own blood.

And the Anticipator, horribly afraid, ran down a by-street.



FINIS.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.

AN UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE.

BY L. G. MOBERLY.

"Jack, I really don't think I can bear that wardrobe where it is, with the long glass just opposite my bed. I know I shall have nightmare. Do you think it could be moved?"

I hesitated and murmured something about the trouble of having the furniture moved in a hotel, &c., while handing my wife the English letter I had brought upstairs for her. She had been lying down after our journey, and now sat up on the bed to utter the above remarks about the wardrobe. She was very pretty, that little wife of mine, with her curly, tousled head, and the face that sleep had flushed to a soft rosy-pink—very pretty, and so ludicrously, ridiculously young to look at.

Her letter did not occupy her long. She looked at me again.

"Jack, darling, you will have that wardrobe moved, won't you? If I were to wake in the night and see my own face in it, I should be so horribly frightened. Do have it moved, Jack, dear!" She knew perfectly well, little witch, that if she spoke to me like that, and looked at me pleadingly out of her pretty eyes, she would get exactly what she wanted—and, of course, she did this time. The wardrobe, which had been placed precisely opposite one of the two beds that jutted out from the wall between the door and window, was now moved to the corner near to the window itself, so that, although from the beds we could still catch a glimpse of the glass, we could see nothing reflected in it.

We were staying in a big, pleasant hotel, the locality of which matters little. We found many pleasant folk among our fellow guests, and we had really a delightful evening, spent chiefly in sitting upon the terrace which overlooked the very lovely garden of the hotel. The delicious scents of the many flowering shrubs filled the air with exquisite fragrance; the fresh breeze blowing softly round us seemed to come straight from the great range of mountains along the horizon, giant shapes, dim and misty, outlined against the pale green of the evening sky, where the stars were coming out one by one.

It must have been very late before we reluctantly dragged ourselves indoors, and went up to our room. Just before putting out the light, I opened the venetians outside our window to breathe the heavenly air once more. It was a still, starry night. The garden below me was quite dark, and the dim mountain shapes could no longer be seen. The nightingales in the bushes sang and sang as if they could never sing enough, and to the music of their song, with a deep undecurrent of the bull-frogs' emphatic voices, I fell asleep.

I slept the sleep of the just, as I usually do, and, I should think, must have been asleep for some time, when, suddenly, a flash of light before my eyes woke me. My first impression was that it must be lightning; my next, that my wife had turned on the electric light over our heads. But, as I woke up fully, I realised that the room was dark; from the bed next to mine I could hear quiet breathing, showing, beyond a doubt, that my wife was asleep.

But—but—I sat up in bed, and stared; for the long glass in the cupboard, which had been moved that afternoon, was entirely lighted up. As I have said, this cupboard now stood nearer to the window than it had done before, and, though it was not opposite my bed, the light upon the glass had evidently flashed into my eyes and awoke me. But where in the name of fortune had the light come from? I rubbed my eyes. I leant a little out of bed, as I tried to persuade myself that some light from outside must be reflected in the glass, though I knew perfectly well that this was impossible, for not only were the venetians closed, but the curtains inside the room were also drawn.

Then I tried to think that the light came through the keyhole of a room opening into ours; but this was a still more fallacious argument, for the door in question was on the farther side of my wife's bed, and nothing could by any means have been reflected from it into that glass.

"Well," I thought, "I am the victim of a most extraordinary optical delusion!" For, whilst I sat up in bed and stared at it, that glass remained steadily lighted up!

"I shall get up and see if it is something outside the window," I muttered; and, creeping very softly out of bed, I drew back the curtains and gently opened the venetians. Everything in the garden was absolutely still, and pitch, pitch dark. Not a sign was to be seen in any direction of a light of any sort or kind, and even the stars were blotted out by great black clouds. I turned back towards the room. It, too, was entirely dark—with the exception of that glass, which was still brilliantly lighted from top to bottom.

But, all at once, I noticed an extraordinary circumstance. The glass did not reflect the stove and chair, which were the only objects now in front of it, neither did I see myself mirrored in it. On the contrary, I saw in it only a bed, and in the bed lay a form—a woman's form. I could see quite plainly how her black hair was tossed about on the pillow in curly disorder.

"It seems queer," I said to myself, with, I must confess, a very weird and uneasy sensation; "deuced queer!"

I should like to have *done* something—turned on the light, rung a bell, or, in fact, done anything but what I did do, stand there rooted to the spot, with fascinated eyes fixed on that glass.

Where the dickens did that bed come from? And who was the

woman in it? It was not my wife, that I could swear, for her hair was fair and fluffy, and that woman's was black as night.

Then, as I watched, my hair literally stood on end with horror. I believe I was shaking with fright, for I saw that figure in the glass sit bolt upright in bed, a look of such wild terror on her face as I shall never forget—never to my dying day. Her eyes, fixed on something which I could not see, grew strained and staring, in a perfect agony of fear and horror. I saw her open her mouth as though to say something—to cry out, I thought it was. I saw the flush of sleep fade from her cheeks, leaving an ashy whiteness in its place. Then she threw out her hands with a passionately pleading gesture towards something that was coming to her—a very agony of appeal in her every movement.

And at that moment there came into the blaze of light a tall man's figure. He seemed to come from the end of the bed, as though he had entered the room by a door immediately opposite to it. (In a flash of recollection, I remembered a third door in our room, opening directly opposite my wife's bed.) I could not see the man's face; he was dressed in some sort of dressing-gown, and in his uplifted hand he held a great knife. He paid not the very smallest heed to the agonised gestures of the woman. He simply advanced to the head of the bed with great strides. The woman crouched back against the pillows, her poor little hands pitifully beating against his shoulder, but he seemed utterly regardless of her terror or of her appeals. He pressed her back—farther, farther back against the pillows, and I saw her white, upturned face gleam in the flashing light. I could see the fearful, deadly terror in her dark eyes as suddenly he raised the great knife high in one hand, holding the other over her mouth—to stop her screaming, I suppose.

But he did not, as I expected, plunge the knife deep into her heart. No, he lifted the pillow, like another Othello, and pressed it down, down upon her, till I felt as if I myself were being suffocated. Then he lifted it up again, and laid her down, and, as he did so and turned away, laying the knife beside her on the bed, I saw his face—a dark, evil, devil's face. It seemed to glower at me out of the brilliantly lighted glass just for a second, and I saw his every feature—the black, evil eyes, the hard mouth, the low forehead, over which a straight lock of black hair fell. I saw how he lifted his hand to push the hair out of his eyes—and then, all at once, the light faded out of the glass and I could see no more.

The room was in darkness, and, sick with horror, shivering with a horrible dread, I crept into bed again. I did not sleep another wink. I could only lie and puzzle over the gruesome thing I had seen, and speculate over and over again as to its cause or its object. But I arrived at no solution, and never in my life have I been so thankful as I was that morning to see the grey dawn steal through the venetians and to hear the birds calling to each other in the garden below.

My wife remarked on my appearance, which was certainly not altogether festive. I looked as though I had been having a rowdy night, which I most emphatically had *not*! Avoiding as best I could my wife's anxious questions, I dressed hurriedly, being above all things anxious that she should never know of the horror I had seen in that hateful glass. I went downstairs as soon as I could, and sought out the owner of the hotel.

He is not a master of my language, but, fortunately, I am familiar with his, and I asked him quietly, but with a good deal of lordly severity, to explain my extraordinary experience of the previous night.

I think he meant at first to deny all knowledge of the phenomenon; but he had turned visibly pale at my allusion to it, and obviously knew all that was to be told. And, with a little more browbeating, I got it out of him. He apologised most humbly and profoundly for having put us into that room; but, as he explained, the hotel was so full that it was unavoidable. He then went on to tell me that, some time before, an Italian lady and gentleman, husband and wife, had occupied the room we had slept in and the one next to it, whose door was opposite to my wife's bed. On the morning after their arrival the husband had roused the whole hotel, declaring wildly that his wife had been murdered—which had, indeed, proved to be the case. There lay the lady, stone-dead, a knife beside her on the bed—one of the hotel knives, my host explained in an injured voice—and her husband nearly mad with grief and horror. But the strange thing was that, though the knife lay there, no sign was visible of its having been used. The poor lady had evidently been suffocated. The husband, who had slept in the room next to his wife's, said that the door between their rooms had been open all night, but he swore he had heard no sound. How the murderer had come, where he had vanished to, and, above all, why he had murdered the poor, innocent lady, remained profound mysteries.

"Do you mean that the murderer is still at large?" I asked the hotel-keeper.

He nodded.

"Well, I could identify him anywhere," I said sharply.

The man looked at me keenly.

"You saw, sir—you saw?" he stammered.

"I saw the whole thing, from beginning to end, in that infernal glass," I replied; "the whole ghastly performance. Has no one ever seen it before?"

My host crossed himself rapidly.

"It has been seen before," he whispered; "but no one has ever seen

it all. The lighted glass—yes—and a lady, the lady in the bed—and a man who enters. But, then—no one has ever dared to stay to face all the horror through. No one ever saw the man's face. They have all fainted, or run away—or what not. You saw his face, sir?" he ended incredulously.

"As plainly as I see yours," I said. "If ever I see it in real life, I will let you know."

We moved our room that night, on some plea I gave my wife—I forget now what it was—and a few days later we left the place, and I must confess, honestly, I was not sorry to go.

But fate works strangely sometimes. Six months later, my wife was convalescent after a severe illness, and the doctors insisted on my taking her to this very place again. I suggested many other localities. But, no; there she must go, and nowhere else. So, back we went, and found it very charming, even in winter; steeped in sunshine, fresh and sweet, with clear, dry air and deep-blue sky.

We had been there a week, and my wife and I were sitting at our small table in the great dining-room waiting for lunch, when the door behind us opened and someone came in.

"Oh, what a hateful-looking man!" my wife exclaimed, and I saw her shudder. I glanced around, and, by Jove! I shuddered myself, for, walking down that dining-room, with a brazen, jaunty air, was the very man whom I had seen in the glass murdering the poor lady. Without a word, I bolted out of the room and breathlessly rushed to the bureau, where the



MISS DAISY HARRIS SEDGER.

Photo by Ellis, Upper Baker Street, N.W.

master of the house looked at me as if I were a lunatic.

"The man is here!" I said, as soon as I could speak.

"What man?" he asked, bewildered.

"The man who murdered the lady in that room where the glass is. Come quickly; I will show him to you."

I think he still thought me mad, but he reluctantly followed me to the dining-room door, and I pointed cautiously down the long room to a table at the other end, where the gentleman in question was placidly beginning his soup.

"There," I said; "there he is, sitting at that table!"

"But no, sir, no!" gasped my companion; "you are mistaken. It is impossible; that is the lady's husband. He comes here every year, to lay flowers on her grave."

"Oh, does he?" I answered, savagely; "then the more devil he! That is the man who murdered her, I swear it!"

And he was the man.

Other little bits of evidence cropped up, and in the end the miserable creature confessed to the deed. It was some story of fiendish and impossible jealousy, and of awful, ungovernable temper; but the details have escaped my memory.

One curious fact remains, or, perhaps, two facts. One is that from the day the villain confessed his deed the ghastly tragedy in the glass was never again enacted. The other is that, from that day to this, I have never either cared or dared to sleep in a room where a long glass faced my bed.



THE SISTERS.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY LALLIE GARET-CHARLES, THE NOOK, TITCHFIELD ROAD, N.W.

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A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.

THE VAMPIRE.

BY BASIL TOZER.

It was in 1896 that we met for the first time. We were seated at *déjeuner* beneath the great green trees in the Champs Elysées, and he accidentally spilt some wine over my hand. Naturally, he apologised, and as naturally I forgave him. Indeed, I remember that I ended by calling for a fresh bottle and offering him a choice Regalia, for the more we conversed the more he seemed to me to be one of the most charming young men that I had met for many a year. We soon found, too, that we had interests in common, and his conversation quickly showed him to be cultured and well-read. English by birth, he could speak German, French, and Spanish fluently, and Russian very well. Then, besides taking his degree, he had, I discovered, stroked the Oxford Eight, and, from remarks which he dropped incidentally, I soon judged him to be a finished horseman as well as a fine shot. Gabriel Vincent, in short, was a scholar and a sportsman. He had come to Paris, he said, chiefly to witness the race for the Grand Prix, which was to be run on that very afternoon. So we talked about the race and of the racing season in general for half-an-hour or more, and when he told me that he was going to Longchamp unaccompanied, the friend who had promised to join him having been detained in London, I at once suggested that we should go together.

"You seem to have travelled a great deal," I chanced to remark as we drove in his victoria through the delightful Bois.

"I have, but, oddly enough, I have never before been in Paris."

"How does it impress you now that you are here?" I asked casually.

"So far, I have seen nothing except the racecourse and the Cascade, Rue de Rivoli and the Brighton Hotel."

"You are staying at the Brighton?"

"Yes. I dislike great, noisy hotels. Besides, one is better looked after at a small place, if one can afford to pay—and I can do that."

He uttered the last words in a cynical tone, and a strange look passed over his face. I was puzzled. The tone implied utter contempt for wealth and for persons wealthy, himself included.

"Do you know Paris well?" he suddenly asked, as though anxious to cut his train of thought.

"I do. I can say that without hesitation."

"And are Frenchwomen really so charming?" he asked all at once, looking beyond me.

I glanced at him quickly. Several remarks which he had made during our drive had already convinced me that Gabriel Vincent was a young man of unusually strong affections.

"You may find them so," I replied drily.

We were arriving at Longchamp just then, and the conversation changed.

Six weeks passed. Gabriel Vincent was still in Paris. We had met almost daily. Often we had *déjeuner* and dinner together; frequently we spent afternoons together. Sometimes we sailed up the river and returned in the cool of the evening, for he was an idle man of fortune. But at night I now saw him but rarely. He never suggested our going together to the play, as he had been wont to do during the first fortnight of our acquaintanceship. The reason of this I guessed—and regretted. Still, it was not for me to interfere. Probably, I thought, he will pass through the phase. Then he will see the folly of it all, he will feel disgusted, he will turn the leaf and start a fresh page in life. I was mistaken.

Excess of work had necessitated my staying at the office later than usual, and the streaks of dawn were striving to pierce the mist which hung like a veil over Paris as I walked briskly homewards. It was in the Rue St. Anne that I saw the door of a gloomy-looking house open suddenly, and Gabriel come stumbling downstairs and out into the street, allowing the spring-door to close behind him with a dull thud. He was in dress-clothes, but his tie was missing, his shirt-front rumpled, his hat brushed anyhow and stuck on anyhow. For the moment I thought he must be intoxicated; but, upon my approaching him, I saw that he was evidently under the influence of some stimulant different from alcohol. Judging from his appearance, he might even have been drugged, for his eyes had about them that unnatural sort of brilliancy so often an after-effect of certain potent physics.

He had not yet noticed me, and he lurched round to glance up at the windows of the house. The Venetian-blinds were nearly all let down, and the lights in the rooms were being lowered one by one. Suddenly a tall, graceful woman, attired in a flowing gown, with an abundance of fair tresses reaching nearly to her waist, stood before the last window upon the second floor and waited there motionless. Her face! I shall never forget it. For it was lovely in the extreme, yet revolting; it was attractive, yet terrible; it was a face that might aptly have been described as "horribly beautiful." The features were those of a Guido Virgin's, the expression that of a devil. Cruelty and sensualism, lust and cunning, power of loving and power of hating—these and some similar characteristics were stamped upon the face as I have never seen them portrayed upon any other human countenance. And though the eyes were human eyes enough, they were eyes of an uncommon kind, eyes of the sort that denote gigantic will-force, the eyes of a Lesbia, the eyes of a Punk. They were strangely striking eyes, and Gabriel, looking up,

waved his hand limply at the figure quickly disappearing as the Venetian-blind rattled down.

I felt grieved at the thought that he cared for such a woman. Even now he had not seen me, in the half-light. Being but a few yards away, I quickly overtook him as he slouched along, and, laying my hand upon his shoulder, exclaimed in jest—

"Caught out, old fellow!"

He spun round and struck me a terrific blow in the face with his fist. Then I saw nothing but hundreds of tiny lights of every conceivable colour shooting about in blackness. When at length I recovered, he had vanished.

I saw him at the Divan Japonais two nights later, faultlessly attired as usual. He was alone. He waved his hand to me, indicating the vacant chair at his elbow. I had meant to cut him, but I changed my mind. He extended his hand as I approached. I did not take it, but, with a distant nod, sank into the proffered seat.

"Why," he exclaimed half irritably, half puzzled, "what on earth is the matter? and—why! look at your forehead!"

"You young hypocrite!" I replied snappishly. "If you had not surprised me, like a coward, *your entire face* would be blacker now than my forehead."

He stared at me. He gaped in wonderment.

"Of course, you forget everything now," I continued more calmly.

Then, of a sudden, his expression changed completely. For several moments he looked quite haggard. The skin about his eyes, I noticed now for the first time, had a strange bluish tint.

"Tell me—tell me everything," he whispered, with an effort.

Seeing that something was amiss, I did so. I was still speaking, when he placed his arms upon the table and buried his face in his hands. He remained thus for several minutes after I had ceased. Then he looked up.

"It comes," he groaned; "my God, it comes!"

He paused.

"Believe me," he resumed earnestly, "I was not drunk, yet I have no recollection whatever of what happened after I left that room in that house. I give you my word that I do not remember striking you. My dear fellow"—he put out his hand, and I took it now—"you are practically the only friend I have, and I would sooner burn my fist off than strike you intentionally. What prompted me to do it—you say I did it—I cannot conceive. Truly, I am sorry, extremely sorry, and I apologise."

"Say no more about it," I replied lightly. "What will you take now? A cognac? Then I will join you."

But I could see that he was greatly upset. He was pensive and absent-minded. In vain I tried to promote conversation. He it was who at last broached again the subject of the eventful night, who first spoke of the woman to whom I had alluded in the lightest way possible while telling him of his doings during the small hours of that, to me, memorable morning.

"She is a devil," he exclaimed at last, "a devil; and yet I can't escape her." Perspiration stood upon his brow. "It comes," he said again; "my God, it comes!"

I waited. A feeling of delicacy closed my lips, though I longed to know what he meant—what was coming to him.

"Shall I tell you all?" he asked presently, partly addressing himself.

"If you care to do so—why, do," I answered.

He placed his moist hand upon mine. He looked me straight in the eyes, as though debating with himself as to whether or not he could trust me.

"Let us go out," he exclaimed; "this atmosphere is stifling."

We drove through the cool night-air, without exchanging half-a-dozen words, as far as the Brighton Hotel. It was past midnight. He rang twice, and the drowsy *concierge* pulled the *cordon* and we entered. We crept upstairs, and, when we were in his sitting-room, he closed the door, turned up the gas—there is electric-light there now—and, producing spirits and a siphon, pushed them towards me.

"Sit there," he said.

Then he unlocked a trunk and drew from its recess a small strong-box. This he placed upon the table and unlocked. It contained a large quantity of notes and gold, a cheque-book, a bank-book, half-a-dozen letters, and sundry documents. All this he pushed aside, and, a moment later, he found what he wanted. It was a metal tube of strange design and black with age. He unscrewed the cap at the end of it and shook out a roll of yellow parchment wrapped in transparent oil-cloth and apparently none the worse for wear-and-tear and the ravages of time. This he carefully flattened out, and handed to me.

"Read it," was all he said.

One side was covered with very clear writing, dated June 11, 1653. The characters were, of course, those in use at that period, but they were decipherable, and the phrases, though quaintly turned, were understandable. I lighted two candles, spread out the document, and began to read to myself its contents.

But I had read barely half when its entire purport flashed across my mind. If what I was reading were truth, not fable. . . . I looked up. Gabriel sat staring before him, his face blanched. Apparently he did not see me; he might even not have been aware of my presence.

"Gabriel!" I exclaimed, "Gabriel, is all this true?"

The sound of my voice aroused him. He looked at me blankly, and merely nodded. With a choking sensation I turned to the document, and finished reading it. As I let it go, it sprang again into a roll, and fell upon the floor.

"And . . . no heir who passes the age of five-and-twenty shall escape . . . though he shall hope and not believe . . . nor shall he reach his twenty-sixth year. . . ."

The meaning of the closing sentences seemed to be bubbling in my brain as Gabriel raised his head.

"And I hoped!" he cried bitterly; "I, too, hoped I might escape; I, too, did not believe!"

"Come, Gabriel, cheer up," I said, with a forced appearance of gaiety; "the worst may not come, after all."

"It has come to every heir in every generation since that year. None of them believed in it until within a year or two of the time it came, and they one and all hoped to escape. And the horror of it! The bare thought of my uncle's death-scene—my uncle, from whom I inherited the fortune—it is awful, too awful! And he, too, hoped."

"Are the statements recorded in that document all true?"

"Quite, I believe—absolutely true."

"What is your age now?" I asked, anxious gradually to turn the conversation. He did not answer. For nearly a quarter-of-an-hour we sat together, smoking, sipping, but seldom speaking. Presently Gabriel flung aside his cigar.

"Aphélie is my curse," he said.

I looked up inquiringly.

"The woman you saw," he added.

"Then why not avoid her?"

"I cannot. I half guessed she would be. I tried to keep away. I cannot. She is no ordinary woman."

He stopped. Suddenly he continued quickly—

"Three weeks ago she forced me to make a promise. I made it of my own free-will, yet against my will, against my better understanding. I was—I am still—a despicable fool. I cannot help it. 'I want you,' she said. 'I will give you greater joy than you have felt on earth before—joy greater than you will feel in death.' She smiled as she said the last words, and I thought her more than ever intensely beautiful. I laid my hand upon her hair and stroked her perfumed tresses. She placed her arm about my neck and kissed my lips. In the ecstasy of that moment I would have died for her; more, I would have damned my soul for her, and—I told her so. She smiled again; she laughed aloud, a soft, musical laugh; and then she gazed into my eyes, she kissed me gently again on the lips, and then she laid her head upon my shoulder, twining her hair playfully about my neck and face, so that for some moments I was nearly smothered in it.

"You would give your life for me?" she murmured into my ear.

"I have said so," I answered feverishly.

"And do as I ask—all I ask?"

"You know it," I exclaimed.

"And your soul? You would wreck your soul for me for ever and ever?"

"She seemed to breathe more quickly as she put the question in such plain language.

"Anything, everything; I will give my life, my soul, my all. I will . . . if only—"

"A kind of triumphant sob seemed to vibrate through her system.

"Then I am yours now, and you are mine—mine for ever and ever."

"The ecstasy that followed I cannot describe. Think of the greatest joy that has ever been yours, and you are no nearer to realising the ecstatic sensation in which I revelled, and continue to revel. Conjure up in your imagination all the most exquisite sensations you have ever experienced, and still you have no idea."

He was growing unnaturally excited. I ought to have felt contempt for him; I felt only compassion. The whole affair seemed uncanny. I did not like it. Suddenly he jumped up.

"I must go," he said hurriedly. "I must go to her now—I must go to her this moment!"

He seemed to be looking for something.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"No matter; I cannot find it," he exclaimed feverishly. "Ah! it comes, the curse comes! I feel it upon me now! I feel it in my body, in my bones, in my blood, my brain, my very being! I hoped to escape it, but I cannot, so let me live while I may; let me live as I long to live for the short time left me; let me live in sin, in vice, in joy, in ecstasy; let me live, I say, let me live! live! live!—and let me pass, fool!" for I was striving to calm him, striving to control him; but, thrusting me aside, he seized his hat and rushed from the room like a maniac.

I heard him hurry noisily down the stairs.

I heard him shout, "Héla, le cordon!"

I heard the *concierge*, startled from sleep, cry out in reply.

I heard the door in the great gate open, then close with a clatter.

At about noon on the following day I had occasion to drive to the Rue des Petits Champs. A crowd had assembled outside a house in the Rue St. Anne. Several girls with tousled heads and scared faces were peering out of an upper window. I leaned out of the carriage and inquired of an *agent de police* what was happening.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Un Anglais inconnu has been found dead in that house," he said.

Then he grinned.

HORS D'ŒUVRES.

Again the season of heat comes upon England, and we pant and swelter and steam, and run short of water, and are destitute of all protection against heat, as if it had never been warm in all the ages. Just so, when winter comes, we shiver in thin-walled houses made hardly lukewarm with open grates. We are never ready for either heat or cold, and yet we have them both in some strength at one season or other of the year. And so, when either comes, we are unhappy and uncomfortable, and try at vast expense to supply that which nations far behind us have already provided. Surely we must have inherited the unbusinesslike qualities of our possible partial ancestors, the Ancient Britons, who, as we are told, dressed in blue dye and skins; and I feel sure they wore the woad in the winter and the furs in the summer.

Indeed, most of our year is fairly temperate in temperature, though heat and cold are not measured by thermometer alone, and wind and moisture have much to do with the way in which heat or cold is felt. Our usual early spring, with its biting North-East and East winds, is well above freezing on the thermometer, but it cuts worse than a Russian frost of several degrees Réaumur. And even if our climate be for the most part moderate, that is no argument for thinly built houses, for, if heat and cold be not excessive, there are rain and wind. In too many of our suburban villas and cottages you feel the eddies of the autumn gale outside; it lifts your hair and bellies up your carpet. The damp strikes through the porous yellow brick and stains the ceilings. Such architecture is not good for any weather; it is most unbearable in great heat and cold, but it is never pleasant.

And not only do we get air when we do not want it, but when we need it it comes not. The stuffiness of our over-furnished rooms, the dust-traps and germ-traps of carpets and curtains and draperies, choke the atmosphere in rooms already too small. Pet dogs and cats and birds help to consume the air, and add to the dust and stuffiness. In and out of the streets we are always crowded, and we crowd ourselves worst of all. And, then, our dress—especially female dress, with its futile folds and rosettes and puckers and crinkles—all of them storehouses of fluff and microbes! When shall we have the courage to be simple?

Perhaps we cannot emulate the Orientals, and furnish a large room with a long divan, half-a-dozen cushions, and two or three little tables. There must be some provision for the modern civilised man and his ways: a chair or two, some pictures, a musical instrument—if anyone can play it well. But everything stuffy and superfluous should vanish; and then, even in our little rooms, we should have room enough to live decently. Draperies should be a minimum, carpets and cushions and curtains easily to be detached and beaten clean, walls washable, windows of the French pattern, blinds flat. Away with the hidden groove for the cord of the sash-window, the home of mice and beetles; away with that ladder of spiders, the Venetian-blind; away with decorations, and let us have design. Let the necessary, really necessary, articles of furniture be allowed for, and the room designed so that they may be disposed comfortably and with proper seamliness. Or, if this be too great a strain on the artistic faculties of our architects, let houses and rooms be planned with some clear notion of the uses to which they are to be put and the nature of the furniture that will be disposed there.

At present, those who draw out the plans of our homes have much, very much, upon their consciences. I have seen bedrooms that exposed any bed, in any possible situation, to a direct draught. I have seen a narrow chamber, obviously meant for a bedroom or dressing-room, and small for that, provided with a big fireplace that would have made the place unbearable, and scorched the counterpane, if a fire had ever been lighted. The man who planned that room could not have *thought*. Even in winter, a little portable stove would have warmed it enough and to spare. But it was cheaper and easier to make all the rooms in one pattern and furnish them with fireplaces of one size; and so it was done.

It is our dress that perhaps forces its inconvenience most strongly on our notice in time of great heat. Even if we suppress much of the unseen garments, we yet cannot arrive at comfort. Possibly flannels come the nearest to ease for men; though flannels now mean chilly cotton flannelettes. But ladies are less happily circumstanced. Even the modern fashion of evening-dress, ebbing away from the shoulders to an alarming extent, does not give ease and coolness. It uncovers in the wrong directions for health or comfort. An evening-bodice is no more supported by a bow or a string of beads than half-a-dozen storeys of a shop-building on the edge of a sheet of plate-glass. In either case there must be the rigid stays and girders concealed by the apparently airy fabric. A massive floor or staircase with no visible means of support is bad art, as Ruskin has pointed out; the same may be said of ladies' evening-dress in its extreme forms. In any case, it is tight in the wrong places for health and comfort.

The hot summers of late years have done several things to break down the imbecile traditions of male dress; they have shaken the top-hat, and naturalised the cummerbund. Why should not some enterprising artist design dresses for the time when England is semi-tropical? They need not be scanty; they must be cool.

MARMITON.

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL

THE MELODRAMATIST.

By R. E. VERNÈDE.

Illustrated by Ralph Cleaver.



A FIRE, attended with loss of life, broke out last night at 116, Southden Road, E.C. (oilman's), from some cause unknown. Seven fire-engines were shortly in attendance, but the flames, fed by the oil, had obtained such a mastery that little could be effected beyond preventing the spread of the fire to the neighbouring buildings. The whole interior is gutted; the damage, however, being covered, we understand, by insurance. A passer-by lost his life in attempting the rescue of a child."

So much for the report in the morning newspaper. It was docked, apparently, to give a leaderette-writer the opportunity of describing the affair in purple language. For it was Sudley Kent who had lost his life—Sudley Kent, the playwright—and the popularity of his name made more than worth while that half-column on "Heroism—On the Stage and Off." Kent was pictured as one of his own heroes—imperturbable, reckless, ignorant of fear, striding into the flames with a sort of Nelsonian announcement that "England expected," &c. To have described him as entering that furnace in a cocked-hat or tights could not well have been more absurd. I knew that when I read the article, and later I knew it better. The matter was that the stuff lent so ironical an interest to his death. Only a few hours before—on the very night of the fire, in fact—Kent had been dining with me. I had a great admiration for him—for the man and for his work. To look at, he was less like a stage hero than anyone I could conceive, being wretchedly thin, stooping—shuffling almost—with slow limbs and an appearance of one who has forgotten that he is his own motive-power.

He was not in good spirits at dinner, or he would hardly have spoken so much of his own work as he did. As a rule, he was reserved—not of those who thrust their daily chapter or verse down the throats of their friends—and scornful of praise, in a silent fashion. Then, however, he kept referring to his work disparagingly.

"Sometimes it sickens me," he said.

"Becoming famous?"

"Becoming a maker of artificialities, setting continuous puppets a-dance, criticising life—from the point of view of a man with a pen who wants to earn his bottle of Burgundy. . . . This is excellent, by the way."

"Thank'ee," I said.

It was characteristic of the man that he had no knowledge of wines. Whatever he wanted to earn, it was not Burgundy. Nor was it praise, as I found out when I went on to remark that, for my own part, I had never seen cause to consider him an exponent of the merely artificial.

He laughed at that.

"Sir," he said, "what profit the flatteries of a friend when a man's self-contempt is slapping him in the face? I'm a melodramatist. You know what that means. I arrange my gay cavaliers with a dainty lady to each—for those a sword, for these a kerchief. I set them in any century you please, and mix them up with love and death in the excellent old recognisable style. Bah! Sprightly dialogue with a dagger in the ribs; touching appeal to the gallery from a man in his death-throes; song to Her eyebrows—adjunct, a broken leg; situation, the bottom of a crevasse! You know the ingredients. . . . Tell me the value of them."

I told him he was exaggerating, and mentioned some dramatic critique I had read somewhere in which the melodramatist was eulogised as keeping alive the elemental virtues.

"Ideals of the Stone Age," said Kent, scoffing; "and they were conventions then."

"You make life more heroic," I said.

"More magniloquent, twaddling, false, of less interest than it is," he burst out. "Who would give twopence to know in the flesh the

hero who was never afraid, always successful? Not I; not you. Even the boy who could not shudder—in the fairy-tale—was insufferable and had to be broken of his cold-bloodedness. I tell you, man, a melodramatist is a humbug."

"And you'd turn him out of your ideal city?"

"Why not? Look at me; I have killed my hundreds, and never seen a man die—not even in his bed. What is it—what's it like when a man is taken suddenly? Does he laugh, cry, howl—?"

He flung away from the table, growling that he must get back, for he had to kill three villains by a novel method before he went to

bed—"I, who have never seen even a fight!"

I offered to accompany him part of the way back, and spoke sententiously of the selection necessary to every art—at some length. We had got to the Embankment, I remember, when I began to speak of the limitations of his particular subject—melodrama—but he would not listen.

"It's all limitation," he said. "Look at the river!"

He pointed to it, moving slowly downwards under a very thin grey mist. It moved so strongly that it seemed to force the arches of the bridge at Blackfriars, as if they were redoubts held by a half-hearted enemy. It moved silently, too, and a cork went with it and a piece of hay and a floating rubble—insignificant flotsam somehow remembered. On the other bank, low mud-heaps settled about immobile barges that bulked like rocks, with here and there a lighter vessel, funnelled or with masts. Fog shut in the horizon just beyond them.

"Too much fog," said Kent. "Good-night."

So we parted, for the night, as I supposed, since I was to see him again next morning by arrangement. He must have turned into Fleet Street and gone East under the gas-lights, and so, possibly still thinking of his work, reached Southden Street.

"What's it like when a man is taken suddenly?"

That question of Kent's kept recurring to me all the morning, and the leaderette gave no answer. "Too much fog," Kent would have said of it. Painfully ironical, in any case. And, just because of it, I wanted to know more exactly the way of his end. I had the fancy that it would be too glaringly unjust if he died melodramatically.

It was by a piece of luck that, outside the very scene of the fire, I discovered an old man who had been present at the whole affair. He had come to watch the charred and blackened embers of the oilman's shop, together with a few other loungers, as though the ruin formed some triumphant handiwork of his own. His presence on the previous night had given him something of the pride of a showman. He was a part of all that he had seen consumed and fallen away to ashes in so brief a time, and he spoke garrulously, disconnectedly, with a pomp that seems to afflict the simplest person when interviewed concerning some catastrophe.

"Yuss," he announced, "I seed it all. I was among the fust myself. A dark night it was, as you might say."

He moistened his lips in anticipation of a patient hearing.

"You are sure you saw Mr. Kent?" I asked.

"Eggs is eggs," said the old man; "an' if the genelman is him wot went up the ladder—?"

"Yes."

"Then I seed 'im among the fust. There warn't many, an' the engines not 'eard of at that time. . . . Now, if I was a fireman— Eh? Why did I notice 'im? 'Cos 'e stood in the road a-jibberin' to 'isself."

"He had a habit of thinking aloud," I said, nodding.

"Seemed to," said the old man. "Jibberin', I calls it. Wot about? Summat o' this sort: 'Slow smoke—swift fire—tongues o' fire—sarpints,' all about 'ow they twisted. That's wot 'e was a-sayin'—"

I recognised Kent in that, trying to arrive at the right word, the word to match the impression. Later on, it is presumable, words failed him.

"I'd swear to them in a jury," said the old man, hastily, seeming to think that I had looked doubtful. "I thought 'e was 'arf-asleep at fust—kind o' night-walkin'—an' throw'd off 'is 'ead by the flames; talkin' o' sarpints like that. But, I dessay, bein' a lit'ry gent, as you says 'e was, 'e took a little time to collect 'isself."

"I dare say," I said.

"Li'ry gents ain't like captings an' hossifers, ready to horder everybody right an' lef'."

That was true enough. They spend their lives in ordering their fancies mostly, which does not make for action.

"Consikintly, 'e looked a cod-fish till the woman bust out shriekin', 'My byby, my byby!'

"'A child left . . . in the house?' says 'e, wakin' up a little at that.

"'Top-floor—Oh, my byby!' she yelps.

"'Ah! . . . top-floor!'

"That was what 'e said, in a uneasy, slinkin' kind o' voice, an' I seed 'im lookin' about as if 'e'd 'ad enough an' was thinkin' o' trottin'. There was smoke crumplin' out o' the winder where she kep' p'intin' to—a lick o' flame too; in fac', it was pretty plain to me as she'd better give up thinkin' about 'er byby. An' I said so. . . Jus' then, some men run up a ladder to the winder, but, the fire comin' out of it now an' agen, there wasn't nobody liked to go up. The woman kep' shriekin', 'Save 'im!' an' 'Cowards, save my byby!' Several folks patted 'er on the shoulder. I did meself. Then I see that the genelman—your friend, you say—'adn't gone. 'E was makin' for the ladder.

"'Save 'im!' There she was, a-shriekin' agen, as if she 'adn' got plenty of 'em.

"'Hold the ladder, will you, please?' says the genelman.

"'You ain't a fool?' says I, though, 'aving 'eard 'im jibber, I warn't by no means sartin.

"'I dunno,' says 'e. 'But hold the ladder!'

"Well, we 'eld it, me an' some others, an' 'e went up. 'E was still a-jibberin', an' I 'eard 'im say, 'Now, is this mellydrama?'" I understood, from the disgust apparent in the old man's tones, that Sudley Kent had not done the deed of his life in the grand manner.

"It wasn't like that, I suppose?" I said.

"Mellydrama? Well, 'e wasn't much of a acrybat, though quicker'n I expected, 'avin' seen 'im dozy. Mind you, 'e was a lot smarter'n any o' they acting chaps as I see onst rescuin' some womin out of a cardboard 'ouse in a theayter, but not much style. In course, it were different, me 'oldin the ladder all the time. . . . I dunno—gimme a seat an' a norange." He paused, in order to fill in the

scene with these dramatic properties and to contrast it with his ideas of the dramatic. "No," he resumed, "it warn't much like the theayter."

That was the view of the man at the bottom of the ladder—one of those ancient Londoners whose quick wit goes in ineffectual criticisms of the surface. He was willing—eager, indeed—to contribute further details, but I saw that they were born of his imagination and calculated to enhance his own importance, and I left him.

In the end, I was enabled to supplement my facts by calling on the fireman whose engine had been first on the scene—who himself had been in, as it were, at the death. I found him among the

strange engines of his craft, shining-faced under a row of shining brass helmets, and polishing away as if his life depended on polishing.

When I asked if he could tell me anything of what happened, he became a little reserved and told me he was new to the work.

"Not but what I've seen a man killed afore," he said, apologetically.

"This was different, was it?'

"Nastier," he said.

It appears that, almost directly after Kent had vanished into the room, the first engine arrived, the fire-escape following. This young man, therefore, had used the escape ladder, and not the one already there. When he reached the top, almost as soon as he looked into the fuming place, Kent came staggering out of smoke to the window. A child was in his arms.

"Hand it here," said the fireman, quickly, seeing that Kent was more than half-dazed, and it was handed without a word more.

He took it under one arm and

turned to give Kent a hand. Even where he stood, outside the window, the fire was stifling hot. Kent had paused to get breath, and, for that purpose, steadied himself by putting his hand on the window-ledge. At the shrivelling heat of it, he gave back, with a cry, violently. The floor, eaten by the lower flames, must have yielded to his weight, for floor and man fell through together. Looking in with scorched eyes, the fireman saw only a red-hot pit. . . .

Then he clutched at the ladder and tried to put his fingers in his ears, for out of the furnace there came shriek after shriek, like a wounded dog's, but sharper. These broke away into a whimper, and presently that also stopped.



At the shrivelling heat of it, he gave back, with a cry, violently.

"THE MELODRAMATIST."

A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL.

THE GHOST THAT DIDN'T: A MODERN TALE.

By HILL ROWAN.

IT was twelve o'clock on a dreary night. Through a hundred chinks in the old walls of Bleakleigh Towers the wind shrieked dismally. It was the one night in the year when, it was rumoured on the countryside, the ancestral ghost appeared to the reigning Duke and revealed some dreadful secret of his family.

And the young Duke of Bleakleigh sat waiting for it. With a ten-shilling cigar between his fingers, a fifty-guinea dressing-gown wrapped loosely round him, he lounged on the two-hundred-guinea sofa and waited.

Not that he was frightened. He was too much preoccupied for that. For this was the last night of his ownership of Bleakleigh Towers. All was lost. The dual income had shrunk to a mere five hundred thousand a year. The hundred thousand necessary for the annual upkeep of the castle—the painting and upholstering essential for the barest comforts of life—could no longer be spared. The stud of motor-cars had been cut down to twenty. Retainers had been dismissed one by one until but sixty hung mournfully about the estate.

The moment ruin had set in the Duke had offered to break off his engagement with the young Lady Stoneleigh—for he was a gentleman of honour, and could not bring a helpless, delicate girl to share the privations of a narrow income—and go out into the cold world as company-director, Ambassador, or Colonial Governor on a pittance of a few thousand a year; for a Bleakleigh never thought it dishonour to throw off his coat, if need should arise, and work side by side with any Archbishop or Prime Minister.

And she—for she had become engaged to him for his money—nobly and frankly released him from his engagement.

And so it came about that it was his Grace's last night at Bleakleigh. From the jewelled decanter he poured out a glass of the forty-shilling liqueur brandy and lit another half-sovereign's worth of cigar. Heigho! it would soon be only Heidsieck and Mumm and a common rented house in Park Lane!

What was that?

Above the rising storm and the beating of the rain a sound of footsteps could be heard in the corridor.

The ghost!

It was! The door slowly opened of its own accord, and closed again, but not before it had admitted a silent, shadowy, thin white figure, which right through its body showed the pattern of the wallpaper.

It moaned.

But a blasé, well-educated man of the world like the Duke of Bleakleigh, trained every hour of his life to repress his feelings, could hardly be expected to show excitement.

He laid down the liqueur-glass, rose politely, and, adjusting his cravat, observed—

"I imagine—I presume you're the—in fact, the ghost. It's your night, isn't it?"

Here the apparition shrieked and waved its right arm.

"You always do that, don't you?" said the Duke. "What the object of it is I never could see; still, I suppose you've got to go through it."

The spirit howled again.

"I don't want to seem inhospitable," remarked his Grace, "but I'm rather busy to-night. I'm giving the place up and all that sort of thing; so if you could—"

"Soul!" spoke the apparition solemnly, "I have a message for thee. On this night in the year it is my task to leave the tomb and come—"

"I know what you mean," said his Grace, looking slightly bored in spite of his polite efforts not to show it. "I read it up in the family records some time ago, though I've forgotten it since, don't you know; it was so awfully dull."

Apparently in surprise, the ghost let fall his dead white cloak and revealed a remarkably handsome young man clad in armour.

"Why, you're not frightened!" he exclaimed.

"Why should I be?" asked the Duke, sinking back on the sofa again and relighting his cigar. "You haven't done anything yet. As for waving your arms about and shrieking, you can do that as much as you like."

"All the others fainted or went out of their minds," argued the ghost, "and the family gave out I had told them some horrible secret."

"Probably to improve their position in Society," added the Duke. "Nothing like a secret of some sort for that. However, sit down, won't you? By-the-bye, I don't know who you are."

"Your great-great-grandfather. Do you mind?"—here he began to take off his armour—"it's so hot with these things on near the fire—and I never wear them except in business hours. I was shot in that quarrel over cards with the Marquis of Cheate. I've been waiting for a chance like this for a century."

"A chance?"

"Yes, I've been trying to see one of the family about something, and I can't get near them. Socially, ghosts are absolutely boycotted," he said wearily as he sank into an easy chair with a rattle of bones.

"It must hurt you rather?"

"It does. If a man can't haunt his own castle, I ask, where is British law and justice?"

"It would hardly do to have a crowd of ancestors hanging about the place, would it?" argued the Duke—"and moaning."

"That's only the murdered ones. It's the only way we have of getting back on the people who have shot us. A suit of armour, a few chains, and you frighten the man all to pieces. It's one of our perquisites."

"So you're really lonely?"

"Lonely's hardly the word for it. Has a ghost no feelings?"

"It hits those Johnnies who write Christmas stories," said the Duke thoughtfully. "I shall never care for one again."

"How you've let the place run to seed!" exclaimed the apparition. "I've been looking round it the last few nights, and it's simply beggarly! How many of the bedrooms do you use?"

"Only sixty-five; I've had to have most of the house shut up."

"I never saw anything like it in my life—in my death, I mean," added the apparition, correcting himself hastily. "By-the-bye, what curious lamps you use! How do you get the oil through a small wire like that?"

"Those are electric-lights," explained the Duke. "They were invented since you were shot by a common man somewhere in America. Have a cigar?" He proffered a diamond-studded box.

"No, thanks," said the apparition. "I have never smoked since my funeral. It saddened me greatly."

"Can't I do anything for you?"

"Nothing; except to see about having the churchyard wall repaired. The draught there is scandalous. And you aren't frightened?"

"No; why should I be?" answered the reigning Duke, with a blasé air. "I never heard of ghosts doing any harm; they only shove their arms about and howl, and that sort of thing. What their object is I can't imagine."

"Rather takes the wind out of my sails—knocks the bottom out of the whole affair," said his ancestor. "The fact is, we couldn't do anything more if people stood their ground. How could a man who is transparent do much harm?"

"See through him too easily," said his Grace, venturing on a pun in a way unusual in the Peerage.

"Well, if you refuse to go mad or turn your hair white, it leaves me hardly anything to do. I've been avoided so much by everyone, I've lost all my small talk."

"You've got the people in the churchyard, haven't you?"

"They're so horribly common. Why, Giles the chandler is next to our vault—and he's so pushing!"

"I take little interest in the matter," said his Grace, wearily. "I'm giving up the place."

"Giving it up—after we've had it fifteen hundred years! Whatever for?"

"Can't keep it up. My rents have fallen to five hundred thousand, and I have to let it to a rich man."

"But that's exactly what I came to tell you about!" exclaimed the deceased Duke. "I wanted to show you where those Bleakleigh deeds are hidden. If you find them you have an income again at once."

"The Bleakleigh deeds—I should think so! Put me on to them at once—look alive!"

"I can hardly do that," put in the ghost; "but I'll show you where they are. Five hundred thousand a year!—you *had* come pretty low!"

"Where are they?"

"Here," said the apparition, touching a hidden spring in a painting on the wall. "Give them to your solicitor in the morning and the thing is done."

"But why didn't you tell me before?"

"I tried to, as I said; but one man went insane with fear, and the other turned mauve and died shortly afterwards. Hardly a compliment to one's appearance—what?"

"Wait—it's too late!" exclaimed the Duke. "It's no use—I've let the estate for twenty years; the lease is signed."

"Soon manage that. I'll haunt the place for a week or two, do some groaning, wave my arms over a few of the beds, and the new tenant will be only too glad to give the estate up, and pay you a lump sum down for breach of contract. As he's a rich man he's sure to have an uneasy conscience."

"Saved!" exclaimed his great-great-grandchild, springing up. "You are a Bleakleigh! They always stood by each other."

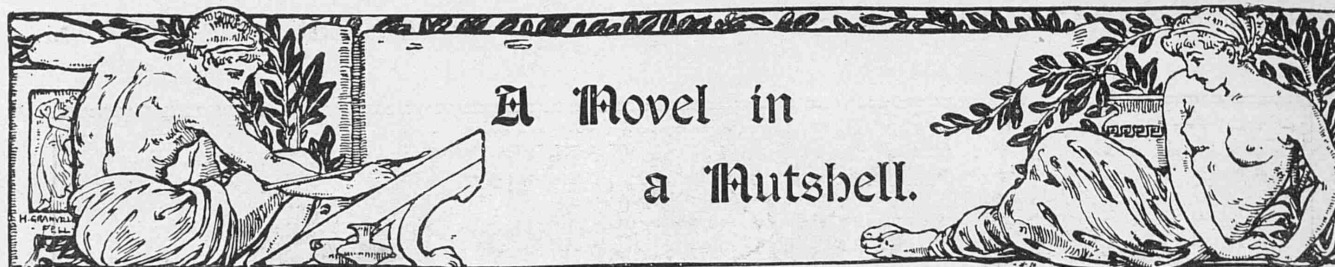
"Hush!" said his ancestor.

The church clock struck one.

"My time is up," he said; "business hours, you know—see you again—this day next year."

He moved away across the five-hundred-guinea carpet and vanished.

THE END.



A Novel in a Nutshell.

IN AN OMNIBUS.

BY ALICE AND CLAUDE ASKEW,

Authors of "Not Proven," "The Shulamite," "The Etonian," etc.

THOUGHT-TRANSMISSION? Clairvoyance? No, I can't say I believe much in that sort of thing; you wouldn't expect it from a matter-of-fact old City man like me, would you? I've had to look on the practical side of things ever since I was a boy.

All the same, I did have a rather curious experience the other evening. It was only a trifling affair, and I daresay there is nothing in it really, but I've tried to apply the ordinary rules of experience to it—tried to work it out by rule of three, as it were; but somehow there's always a hitch that I can't quite level up.

Here's the story for what it's worth: I had had a busy day at the office, and was tired out when I took my usual 'bus home—Hammersmith, you know; and I had walked as far as Charing Cross by way of exercise and to clear my brain of stuffy figures. It had just begun to drizzle, and I was lucky to get a place in the 'bus—just about the centre of the left side it was, up against the metal bar that divides the long seat into halves.

There was only just room for me, for my two fellow-passengers on the right were bulky individuals, so I was wedged up pretty tight against the bar. It's lucky that I'm not a big man myself, or I don't know what we should have done. As it was, in settling down, my arm came rather sharply into contact with the shoulder of a girl who was placed on my left—just the other side of the bar, you understand. She gave a little cry and started, just as if she had been aroused from a nap, and didn't quite know where she was.

Of course, I apologised, and then forgot all about the matter. I didn't even look at the girl, didn't realise if she were smart or shabby, fair or dark. It's very rare for me to take interest in folk I meet in omnibuses. I tried to read an evening paper, but the light was so bad it couldn't be done. Long experience has taught me the futility of such an attempt, yet I'm always doing it—out of sheer perversity, I suppose.

Well, I had to shut up my paper and amuse myself as best I could with my own thoughts. It was then that I cast a casual glance at my youthful neighbour, and—I can't tell you why, for, as I have said, it is quite at variance with my usual habits—I began to speculate as to her position and occupation: a silly thing to do, for she was just a girl like thousands of others, with no special points about her.

She was quite young—nineteen, or twenty perhaps—neither pretty nor ugly, and of nondescript colouring. Her hair was fluffed out on either side of her head, covering the top halves of her ears, and she wore a round cap of some cheap fur. It was quite unpretentious, but somehow it suited her. Her features were rather thin, and she had no complexion to speak of; one could easily guess that she was out in all sorts of weather, or subjected to an unwholesome atmosphere of some kind. Her underlip was chapped a little—you know how cold it was about a fortnight ago?—and there was a little drop of blood just about the centre, where her teeth may have closed on the lip if she had been out of temper; or, of course, it may merely have been the

result of the weather. Anyway, that drop of blood fascinated me, and I think it was because of it that I took such special notice of an everyday sort of girl. There were a couple of curious black spots on her cheek and chin as well. I couldn't make out if they were moles or if she had been spattered by the mud of the street; the state of her dress—a frayed serge—rather indicated the latter, poor child. I think her eyes were grey, but she kept them half closed, leaning back in her seat, inclined a little to my side, as if she were tired out and wanted to sleep. She had nice long lashes, I remember.

Oh, no; I wasn't in the least bit fascinated, or any rot of that sort. I'm not the kind of man who is always on the look-out for chance acquaintances—that game is played out as far as I am concerned. But I had to think of something, and the girl by my side was more interesting than any of the other stodgy folk who had got into the 'bus—a job lot if ever there was one. There was a woman sitting opposite me—a young woman, with a baby on her knees—whose expression was as inane and vacuous as that of the baby itself. Everybody was wet and uncomfortable, and we all hated each other with a cordial hatred.

Well, the 'bus rumbled on, and nobody seemed inclined to move. We were all bound for Hammersmith. I leaned back in my seat as well as I could, to make more room for my stout neighbour, who kept wedging me closer against the rail; the girl was leaning back, too, and my arm—I couldn't help it—pressed against hers. I had my hand upon the rail, you see; she had both of hers clasped upon her lap. She wore no gloves, and she had a cheap ring on one of her fingers—an engagement-ring I suppose it was meant to be. Nobody spoke, and by degrees I began to feel sleepy—forgot all about the 'bus, even about the little lady by my side, and allowed my mind to be a perfect blank. I have rather a habit of doing that after a heavy day, and I give you my word it's most restful to the brain.

At the same time, I suppose—as the clairvoyants would say—the brain is particularly receptive when it is in that condition. Anyway, after a while a curious mist began to form before my eyes, a mist which soon became a blur of dim colour; and this gradually worked itself to a focus of light, in which I felt, somehow, that I could see pictures if I wished. It was a strange sensation, quite new to me. I wasn't asleep, you understand. If I tried I could see the vacuous faces of the woman who sat opposite me and the baby on her knees, the mist dispelling to let me do so; but when I gave myself up to the thoughtless repose, it collected again, and the clear spot in the centre became more defined. I was conscious of one other thing—a curious tingling sensation in my left arm, the arm that pressed against that of the girl by my side; it was just as if the blood were rushing from her veins to mine. I don't know if I make myself clear; it was such a curious experience for a matter-of-fact man like myself that I hardly know how to express it. I hadn't the smallest desire to read the girl's thoughts or to intrude myself unwarrantably into her affairs; but I couldn't help myself, any more than she could: we had got unaccountably *en rapport*—isn't that what you call it?—a sort of unconscious cerebration.

[Continued overleaf.]

Well, she must have been thinking hard of something that had recently happened to her—that very day, I take it. And I saw it all with her eyes. First of all a dingy workroom—a lot of girls sitting at a long table and sewing mechanically dress materials of some sort—I'm no good at describing that kind of thing; but I saw it as clearly as if I'd been in the room. The floor a litter, the table a litter, patterns, stuff of every hue and quality, cut and uncut, yards of it, spread out or tumbled together; dummy figures, some partially clad, some only framework and wooden bust; sprays of artificial flowers, lace, ribbon, cotton. Cotton! Why, the atmosphere of the place seemed loaded with it. You know the close smell of a draper's shop? I assure you I got exactly that kind of impression.

All the girls seemed to be chattering together gaily enough—all except my girl. I saw her as plainly as I see you. She was working a sewing-machine, and she kept glancing at a big, clumsy clock upon the wall. She could hardly see the time by it, for the room was so full of mist; there were flaming gas-jets hanging from the ceiling, but they didn't seem to give sufficient light. However, I knew well enough what the girl wanted; she was anxious for the hour to strike when she would be at liberty to take her departure. The minutes seemed to drag out into eternity for her.

"Will he be there?" That is what she was repeating to herself, and, of course, being for the time, as it were, in her brain, I knew all about "him"—as much as she did, anyway. I thought, with her, that he would be certain to turn up at the appointed meeting-place.

He did. They met at an A.B.C. tea-shop, and he was evidently cross with her for being late. I didn't like the look of the fellow at all; he was a shocking boulder, loudly dressed, and with a bowler-hat set on one side of his head. A loafer, if ever I saw one. He had shifty eyes and a receding chin, and horrid, thick lips. He smiled and chatted amiably enough at first, while the girl nervously sipped her tea; but his expression changed quickly when she leaned forward and began to talk to him very earnestly. I quite expected it would—as did she, poor girl. You see, I knew what was in her mind.

It was pitiful. He regained his composure and began to talk soothingly, but it was such obvious acting. Even she was scarcely deceived by it—though she tried hard to believe him genuine. He kept shifting about in his seat, anxious the whole time to get away. There were tears in her eyes when she rose to go, but he whispered something that made her smile up at him through her tears. I think it was a promise to meet her again.

They parted under the glare of the electric light outside the shop. She lifted her face for a kiss, and he gave it to her; but I think that his kiss must have told her the truth. She stood gazing after him as he disappeared in the crowd, and there was an agony of apprehension in her face.

"He won't come back! I shall never see him again!" You may laugh, but I felt as if the words were torn from my own heart.

Well, I'm very near the end of my story. The girl must have moved her arm just about then, for all of a sudden the whole train of impressions was broken. I started up as if I had just come out of a dream, and those words were on my lips—I actually spoke them aloud—"He won't come back! I shall never see him again!"

She heard me. It must have seemed to her as though I had spoken her actual thought. She, too, was sitting up, and there was a scared look on her face—her eyes were absolutely wild.

"How did you know?" she whispered. Then, realising that I was a stranger, fancying, I suppose, that I had not addressed her, that she had been dreaming: "Oh, I beg your pardon," she said hurriedly.

I can't remember if I replied or not. I was struggling to collect my own thoughts. I felt a bit dazed myself, and perhaps it was lucky that the baby set up a howl just at that moment and distracted everybody's attention. Before I had time to decide how to act, the girl got up, and without so much as looking at me, jumped out of the bus. We were nearing Hammersmith by then, but I'll vow she hadn't reached her own destination.

A queer story, isn't it? I can't attempt an explanation, but I'm absolutely positive that, quite innocently, I got an insight that evening into the poor little tragedy of a girl's life.

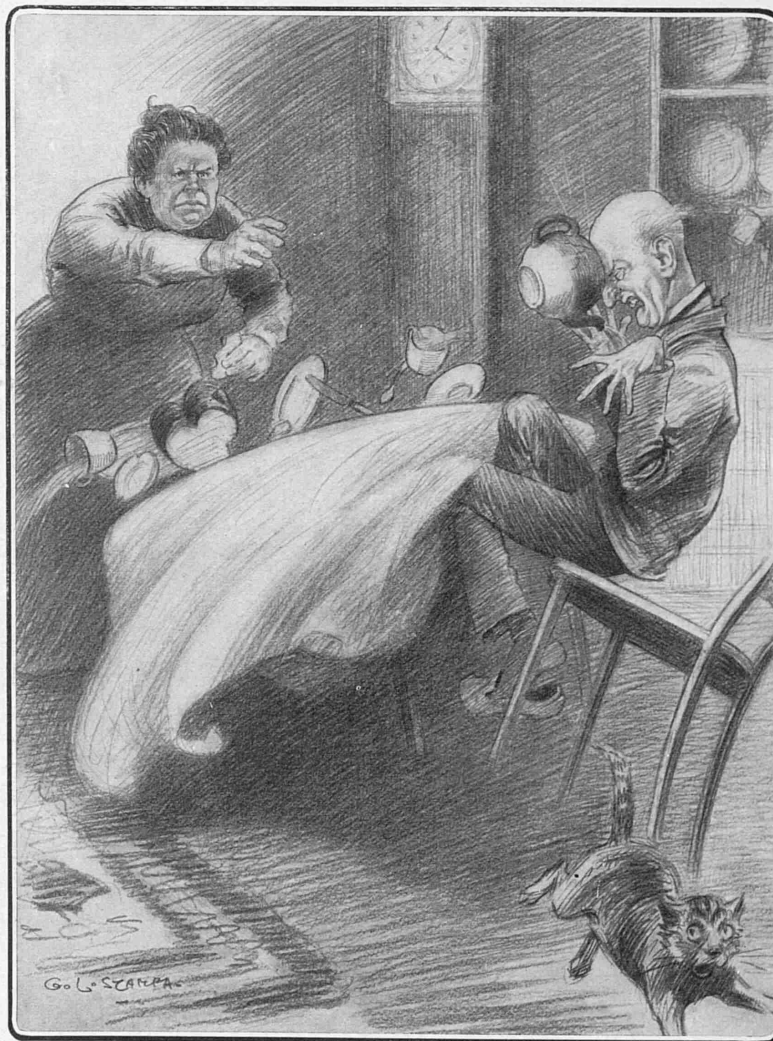
For I'm quite sure he never came back—he wasn't the sort of man to do so.

No, I never saw her again, though I travelled back by the same 'bus night after night, rather in the hope of doing so. But there is a sequel, and it's this—perhaps the strangest part of the whole affair, when one remembers that it was all an impression, a sort of dream.

I saw the man, the identical fellow, dressed just as I figured him that evening. It was at an A.B.C. shop where I sometimes go myself for a cup of tea. He was sitting at one of the little tables, and there was a girl with him, to whom he was engaged in making violent love.

But it was not my friend of the omnibus—oh, no, it was another girl altogether, though I think she was of the same class.

THE END.



A SONG ILLUSTRATED: "THERE WAS A SIMPLE MAIDEN."

In manner she was homely, you must know, yes, you must know,
But oh! her face was comely very long ago.

DRAWN BY G. L. STAMPA.



A NOVEL IN A NUTSHELL

THE SAW - SHARPENER.

By HAROLD BLIND.

"THEY know who likes 'em!" said the old man, as a passing dog nuzzled his hand. He had seen me looking at him as he fixed the saw home in the vice on the heavy wooden tripod before him. He pulled his battered straw hat over his eyes to shade them from the level October sunshine, took a fresh file from his little leather bag, and settled himself on his stool. He glanced up at a lady, who drew her skirts aside as she went into the post-office, and began to work. His eyes were keen and bright and unnaturally large for his thin face.

"Why was he down on his luck? . . . Ah, he had been in the Army! Had he a pension? No! Why? . . . Oh, that was a long story. Yes, he would tell it me if I liked. . . . No harm . . . it was long ago now."

The heedless folk went to and fro amidst noise and restlessness, but the old fellow talked on in easy sentences as the file sang in the teeth of the saw.

The autumn wind seemed to grow hotter and the low sun swung blazing to the zenith; the roaring electric trams vanished with the great ugly church on the "Green," and I beheld the desert stretching out to the vast, dramatic circle of the haze-hid horizon. I looked down on the line of British and Egyptian outposts facing the fanatic power of the Khalifa and the mysterious wastes of sands; I visioned "the shadowy forms of men and horses, looming large-sized, flickering; and over all the sky—the sky! far, far out of reach, studded with the eternal stars."

I deserted my post [continued the saw-sharpener] in the face of the enemy. Instead of shooting me, which I wish they had done, they discharged me.

We were out there in the desert. . . . On our left, miles away, was the fringe of granite hills along the Nile. To the right and front the sand rolled away to where the cursed mirages lay all day—growing, fading, or staying all a-shiver, like a rum kind of cinema. We'd seen ruins and idols and pyramids—great things that made you whisper as if you were in a church. . . .

Now me and a chap called Wilkes were very particular pals. He had been my townie since he joined, and I did him a good turn when the room corporal dropped on him for what he hadn't done. He was a quiet lad with regular golden curls and eyes as blue as our trousers. We called him Polly, because the colour-sergeant came round one night and said that the captain had asked him who was the recruit who had a mug like Apollo. There was a "ranker" who was a wag, and he said: "Oh, you mean the chap that comes from Belvedere Road," and he laughed like steam, but I could never see the joke, nor could anyone else in the room. . . .

Well, anyway, we got very thick together. He was a very quiet chap at best, but when we got to Egypt he never said a blooming word to anybody. He went about with a scared look, and one night he says to me—

"Sam, I've been here before . . . or dreamed it! And it's the place where I'm going to die. I feel it. It's awful!"

"Bill," I answers, "go to the hospital and get the sergeant to give you a liver-stirrer. It's the hot weather, and you miss your beer."

"You blanky fool!" he snaps, "hold your jaw, or I'll smash it!" I'd never seen him angry before. After that we didn't speak. . . .

One night our company got orders to furnish outposts, though it was not our battalion's turn. A rumour went round that the Egyptians, whose duty it was to picket a certain spot, had refused to obey their officers. Nothing would induce them to go out, and no other native companies would go either. Lord! we swore at them, and especially when we heard that their reason was because

the desert hereabouts was haunted. We laughed about it over our tea round the bivouac fires, and a lot of yarns about jinn and ghosts and afreets cropped up. But one old soldier who'd been with Napier to Magdala, and talked a bit of Arabic, shook his head when we joked and punned. He said the East was a queer place, and very like the natives had good reason for refusing duty; and he spun a yarn about the Night of Power when all the unseen world was kind of let loose. But a sergeant soon told him to hold his tongue. . . .

We were sorted out into our various parties and allotted our posts, and we went off gaily with remarks like—

"If you meet a jinn give him ginger!" Or, "Ask him for a drink!" or, "Ask does he come from Plymouth!" And one chap sang out, "Whose afrit of afreets?" and so forth.

But it was a different tale when the groups got away from the pickets, and the sentries from the groups. There, with the silence and the darkness, and the great glittering stars, and the low scrub looking like beasts or crouching men and seeming to move, it was creepy at all times; but having heard these stories, and the Fellahs not taking any at any price, made you go all-overish.

I didn't get the first sentry-go. I sat with the rest of the group on the sand and whispered now and then, but very low and not often, for every morning we'd find men with their throats cut—under our blooming noses. The Fuzzies were like snakes for crawling up.

The time came for me and Wilkes to go and relieve the two sentries who were watching and waiting and pacing away out to our front. Wilkes had been sitting just like a nervous dog in the dark, with his eyes fixed on objects that no one else could see. The corporal prodded him and he rose, stiff and straight, and went with us with never a word, the sand shuffling under his feet. We changed sentries, and our comrades disappeared like shadows and we were left alone. It seemed to us that there was never a living soul within a hundred miles—no, nor yet in the whole world. And when we parted and got out of sight at the end of our beats, we felt alone in the blessed Universe. The first time we met I said to Wilkes—

"My word, don't one feel alone! Not a living soul!"

"Lots of dead ones, though!" says Wilkes. "Can't you feel 'em? I can!"

"Look here, mate, you chuck it, or I'll lam you, and take the bally consequences!" I answers sharp, and looking round. He only gives a kind of moan and goes off again. No good thinking that the brigades lay behind us, and the outposts to right and left, and probably camel scouts in front.

No good thinking that a shot and an alarm would rouse thousands of wholesome men and start 'em blinding like the deuce. I just felt alone! And uncanny shapes began to move on the ground and bring my heart into my mouth, and when I strained my eyes and went towards 'em, or waited, they'd turn into thorn or boulder or a patch. Then, after a bit, I felt that I was being watched—watched from all round. I felt the eyes I couldn't see following every move.

Wilkes met me at the inner end of our beat, and his face was shining with sweat in the starlight.

"Do you feel it? Do you see them? It's awful!" he whispers.

"No!" I says. "Are you mad or drunk, Bill? Where did you pinch the arak? Got any left? I could do a drop, blank you! Pull yourself together, Polly, or we'll cut and run!"

He says nothing, but points to the east and north, and his teeth chatter, and then he clenches them and paces off on his outward "go." All along my walk I keep looking out, ready to shoot or stab. I lie down to get any object between my eye and the

[Continued overleaf.]

skyline. Nothing! Yet all the time I feel the cold water trickling up and down my back, and cold fear drying up my throat.

"Let's stick together, chum!" says Wilkes, when we meet again. "There's something d-d wrong about this place. The niggers were right."

So we stays and peers around us, and presently we kneels back to back, and Wilkes fixes his eyes and lets 'em follow things about like a dog again, and mutters a lot of rot.

"See 'em! There! Going past! Barbarians! Thousands of 'em! Camels, horses, elephants, and chariots! Oh, Artemis!" he whimpers, "save they servant!" and he reels off a lot of names and a lot of foreign lingo. I forget most of it, but some of 'em were Bible names—Nineveh, Babylon, Ur, and Sidon, and Sinai, and the names of men; and he seemed to be counting out detachments passing us. "My Gawd! he's gone stark mad," I think, and I was between the devil and the deep sea—the ghosts and the lunatic.

"Don't move!" he says, "don't move! Keep still, or they'll get us! There go some of the Guards from the City itself!"

At that I hear soft footsteps and I commend my soul to Heaven, and try to remember a prayer. Shadowy forms loom up, and—

"Halt, who goes there?" I shout by instinct, leaping up and coming to the charge.

"Friends!"

"Advance one, and give the countersign!" I says, my heart beating with joy, for it was the visiting patrol. Wilkes was still crouching down.

"What the Hades is the matter? I see *you* squatting down, too, Sam Evans!" says the Corporal to me. "What's up with Polly? You both look scared to death. Why didn't you challenge sooner, and in a low tone of voice? Keep your beats or I'll report you. . . . Hi, come orf it!" . . . He kicks Polly. . . . "Trying to hatch ostrich-eggs, or what?"

Polly got on his knees, and the Corporal drags him to his feet. Men get rough when it's war, and in the night. He lammed him across the face and shook him, cursing low and tense. And I don't deny it was right, because, while Polly was babbling about Elam and Kush, a whole army corps of oiled Mahdists might have slid past us and suddenly begun raising red havoc along the inner pickets, or maybe have reached the sleeping regiments behind, or stamped the baggage-animals.

Polly just picks up his rifle and murmurs—

"Blows and the scourge, blows, blows, blows, and always blows! When will it end, O Thou?"

I remember that because the corporal turned to me as Polly stepped off on his beat, and said—

"I'll send a man to relieve Polly. Don't lose *your* nerve, Sam. If he gets dangerous, land him one with your butt. Don't let him shoot all round the shop and rouse the camp, if you can help it. Humour him. We'll be back soon. I always thought he was a queer 'un—he's booked for Dottyville, now! So long!"

Away they went, their boots going sish-sish in the sand. In half a minute the watching things came gathering in again, and the fear was turning me grey . . . and never a sound—never a move! I tried to whistle a rollicking regimental march inside my head—"Here we go to London Town," *you* know.

All of a sudden I noticed that the sky had grown lighter to our left. I saw the moon rise, and in a few minutes up she comes and floods the desert in a creamy glow, casting black shadows. Suddenly Polly clutches my arm, choking—

"Look—look!"

And, as true as I sit here a-sharpening this saw, there was things moving across the shining face of the moon. Misty things she showed her rim through. Ay, over the moon they went, endlessly—out into the desert like a mist-streak. And they must have been passing us all the time, but I couldn't see them till the moon showed their filmy outlines. A great column of men, and at intervals there were camels and elephants and compact squadrons. They were soldiers, but such as I had never seen. They had long, stiff beards, and queer high helmets, and longish shields, or little round ones . . . and they carried spears, and bows and arrows, and short swords, or axes. Rum standards and banners rose over them. We saw their eyes gleam dull. A lot came by clad in skins, with long hair to their heads, and little bags slung round 'em.

"The Hittite levies," says Wilkes in a dreamy voice—"slingers from beyond Samala!"

"Rot!" I stammers, "they've heads like Fuzzies! Here goes!" and I drops on one knee to plug one, at least, before they

saw us and we was chopped to cat's-meat. It was then I saw that I could see the moon through them—besides, they were marching out of our own lines!

Then I saw that we were right in the path of a fresh column, with glinting riders leading it. Polly had fallen flat, but I dug him up and he raised himself on his arms. Nearer and nearer came those bally field officers, with the bearded head of their dead regiment behind 'em—nearer with never a sound—phantoms! A little cold draught blows on us—like the breath of death. One, whom I took to be the Colonel, saw us, and I looked into the eyes that were like a tiger's in the dark. Wilkes leaps up, a sudden fury in his face—his fear gone—his eyes flaming, too. The horse-man's teeth gleamed between his heavy beard and moustache. God knows what language they talked, but Wilkes *knew* him and cried out, and I somehow understood.

"Murderer!" yells Polly, and springs at the other with his naked hands, "Odynë, my Odynë!"

"What? You!" says the other, gritting his teeth. "You here! You damned Greek thief and traitor, the girl died! I loved her. I've got you at last. Die then, die, you dog! Ha!"

And he drove his short broad sword through Wilkes's chest and shook him off and rode over him. And as I sit here, a great man in a golden misty armour breast-plate and helmet come up to me and lifted his spear. I know that he said to me—

"Down on thy face, slave! It is Cambyases!"

Those were his words, for I remember quite well, quite well. But I . . . But I . . . The icy air crept round me, and the ghosts was marching all about . . . the lost army was drifting past like meadow-mists at home. I ran. I broke through them with a whoop and my bayonet at the charge. I fired into the brown of 'em. I ran. I rushed through our group and on to the rear until I was collared by the picket. And I fought till they bore me down and pinioned me. They hauled me to my feet before the Lieutenant . . . young Joyce-Johnson, and he says—

"You have deserted your post, Evans, in the face of the enemy, and given a false alarm. You know the penalty. Have you anything to say?"

"Sir," I answered, "go out there yourself. The desert's full of marching columns led by a man called Cambyases, who knows poor Wilkes, and murdered him. The ghosts are drifting past ten deep like smoke on a damp day . . . there's chariots with horses all abreast, and elephants and camels. The cold air comes off 'em like a breeze off ice-blocks!" . . .

"Pull yourself together, man! None of this fooling! I'll give you this chance. Will you go back? Your nerve's gone. I know it's trying work at night. Come along!"

"I'd rather be shot. I won't go back—I can't. For God's sake, send a party for poor old Wilkes. No, you can't, though, because of all them spirits—you can see their eyes, Sir, thousands of dead eyes all looking at you. I'd rather die by my comrades' hands a hundred times!"

"Will you come back and show me these spectres?" asks Joyce-Johnson sternly.

"No, no! I'd rather die! Take me away!" I cries, struggling with the men who held me. I thought of the awful sight of all those thousands of lost souls, and I broke down and sobbed.

"Poor fellow," he says to the sergeant, "take him under arrest to the hospital."

"It's true, Sir!" I said. "Go and see! I swear it's true! You'll find Wilkes dead—they murdered him!"

"There, there!" he replies, "it's all right! No one will hurt you. You're quite safe. Go with Sergeant Robinson." And they marched me off.

Wilkes was found stone dead. The doctor said he had a heart disease, and hit his chest on his rifle-butt as he fell, which accounted for the big bruise they found.

Me? Oh, I got quite well, so they said, after I was sent back to Netley. I held my tongue about the yarn I've told you, and they thought I did not remember it. They discharged me from the army as unsound of mind and unfit for further service . . . but I never got a pension.

The old saw-sharpener leaned forward and took the saw out of the vice and held it against the sky.

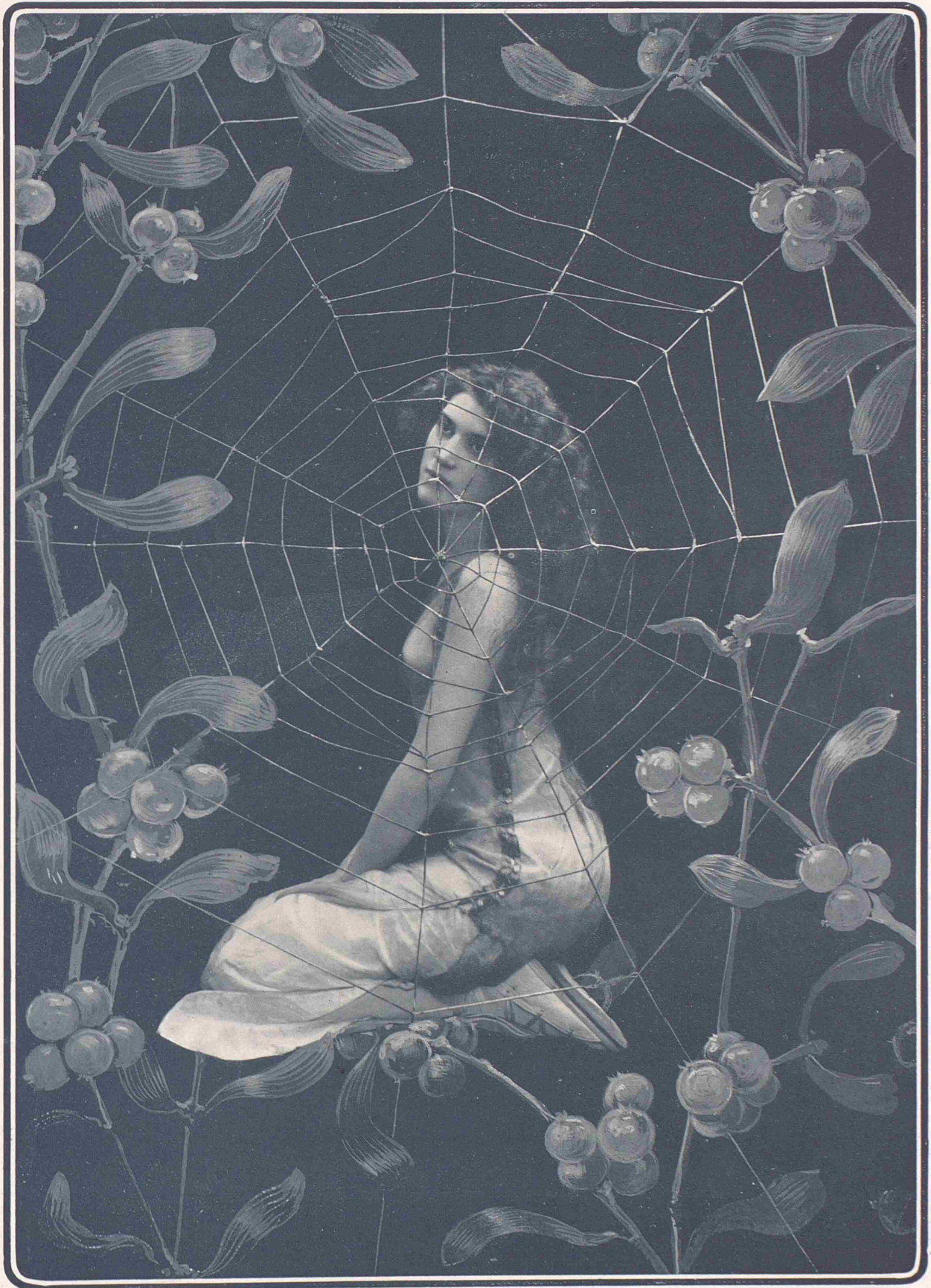
"I swear that what happened there in the desert is true! I swear it to you by the file and the teeth of this saw!"

And he looked at me with his too-large eyes.

I noticed that the pupils were curiously dilated.

THE END.

"Oh, the Mistletoe = Bough."



AS ALLURING AS THE MISTLETOE - BOUGH: THE MISTLETOE - WEB.

Setting by "The Sketch": photograph by Reutlinger.

A NOVEL

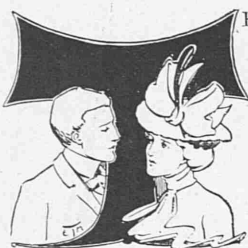
IN

A NUTSHELL.

THE KING'S MASK.

By H. A. HINKSON.

Illustrated by Ralph Cleaver.



HE plague crept slowly but steadily westward, and the small-pox followed in its wake, so that men and women fell dead not only in the city, but even in the fields and among the trees beyond Westminster. The nobles, and the ladies especially, feared the small-pox more than they did the plague, since the plague brought

death, but the small-pox what they dreaded more greatly, blindness and disfigurement.

The King was fled to Hampton Court, and thither many of the nobles had followed him, so that together they might beguile their fears with wine and music and gallantries.

But my Lord Burlington was stubborn and remained behind, being, as it was said, so greatly enamoured of the house which Sir John Denham had built for him that he could not be prevailed upon to leave it. And, for a time, his Lordship's daughter, the Lady Anne Boyle, stood by her father and strengthened his resolve, for he was proud of her high courage, because she was only a girl and the gallant gentlemen had fled from the plague.

But when the cry of death pierced the trees about Burlington House and echoed in her chamber, she thought no longer of her pride, but only of her beauty and the danger that it was in. So she besought my Lord that he would take her away while there was yet time. But he mocked at her fears and chid her for her faint heart.

"Is it a lass of my blood and name and afraid of death!" he exclaimed.

"Nay, that it is not," she answered, proudly, "and, if need were, I would shake hands with death to-morrow, but not that. My Lord, I would die comely and not thus," and she lifted her finger as a faint cry came through the open lattice.

"You are but a child," returned my Lord, but more gently, "and yet you talk as glibly of death as a priest of sin. Think no more on it, for sure 'tis a long way off."

"I would die comely," answered the girl.

"Why, so you shall when the time comes," retorted my Lord; "but now you should think on wedding-garments and not on shrouds. Give me your pretty ear that I may whisper in it."

The girl bent her head nearer, with a faint flush in her cheeks.

"Lord Hinchinbroke is on his way home. Five days ago, he lay in Paris. This morning the news was brought to me by Mr. Pepys."

The sudden flush faded from Lady Anne's face.

"And 'tis for that we wait," she murmured.

"Would you have him die of impatience, to find you gone?"

"Methinks he could contain himself until he found us at Kingston, seeing how long he tarries."

"Had he ever looked upon your face, he had been here long since," Lord Burlington made answer, somewhat uneasily. "All the world praises my Lord Hinchinbroke for his courage and modesty. Haste would be unseemly in a lover."

"I must needs believe it, since all the world speaks so, but yet I would that we were in Kingston."

"Why, so we shall be as soon as he returns. Come, let us drink to his quick return. Hewley, fill her Ladyship's glass."

The butler drew near, bearing the flagon of wine, and did as he was bidden.

"To my Lord's return!" exclaimed the Earl.

Lady Anne raised the glass; then it slipped from her fingers and fell upon the floor in fragments. For a moment she stood gazing at the old servant in speechless horror. Then, pointing a rigid finger at a red mark upon his neck just above the collar of his coat, she shrieked, "See, he hath caught the small-pox!"

My Lord rose with a grey face and motioned the butler, who seemed bewildered by what had happened, to leave the chamber. Then he turned to his daughter.

"We will wait no longer," he said, "but to-morrow we will set out for Kingston."

"Nay, not to-morrow," cried the girl, with her hands on her face, "but to-night!"

"As you will," returned the Earl, at last shaken from his resolve. "We will go at once."

Lady Anne caught her father's hand to her lips and kissed it.

"I would die comely," she whispered.

So it came about that the Earl of Burlington and Lady Anne took coach for Kingston, his Lordship leaving behind him a message for Lord Hinchinbroke bidding him follow them.

Though it was late September, the weather was fair and sunny as June, and the river was gay with the Royal barges, which plied unceasingly between Hampton Court and Richmond, where my Lady Castlemaine was lodged. The roads, too, were full of splendid gallants who had left the plague behind lest His Majesty should lack good company. And many of them drew rein before my Lord's door and lingered until the servants were weary and the horses impatient, so that in a little while the Lady Anne forgot her betrothal and dreamed of lovers again, as she had been used before the Earl of Sandwich coveted her dowry for his son.

But ill news travels fast, and they had left the city scarce ten days when word was brought that my Lord Hinchinbroke had been caught by the small-pox and lay in Paris, slowly mending. The Lady Anne wept bitterly, and refused to be comforted, so that my Lord marvelled that she should grieve so greatly for a gentleman whom she had never seen, albeit she was promised to wed him. Nor did his assurances that all danger was past take the heaviness from her face. She hid herself from all company, and would speak with none save only her father and her maid, Prudence, who was learned in the small-pox, seeing that her brother had lived through it and was so changed thereby that none knew him afterward, and the children, if they met him, ran screaming from him as though he were a wild beast or a devil.

It was even whispered that the Lady Anne herself had been caught by the small-pox and all her beauty ruined, so that the gallant gentlemen with their brave plumes and feathered hats came no longer to the Earl's house as before.

How the matter might have ended is beyond guessing had it not been for a strange kind of rout, called a masquerade, devised by the King, or, as some think, by my Lady Castlemaine. But, however it was, it fell in with His Majesty's humour that the guests should come in such outlandish dress as pleased them, but all having their faces masked, nor had any leave to unmask without the King's permission, and, if one did, the penalty was, for a gentleman, one thousand crowns paid to the King's treasurer, and, for a lady, to be clad in widow's weeds for a year and a day.

At first, the Lady Anne was for refusing to join in the rout, and begged that she might stay at home. "I have no mind for such things," she said.

"'Tis the King's desire," answered my Lord, "and His Majesty has ever considered the happiness of his people."

"'Tis a strange time for a jest, seeing how quick the people die."

"They will die no slower for thinking on it," my Lord broke out; "and 'tis the King's command. A mask will hide the paleness of your cheeks, so that none shall know that you grieve for your husband."

The girl shuddered.

"I would not have them ruddy," she answered, brokenly, "and the people dying. But, since it is His Majesty's command, I must obey—only, I pray you, give me leave to wear garments of a sombre hue, which best consort with the times and my own sad heart."

"Why, Anne, you shall dress your body as you will," replied my Lord, with great good-humour. "Let it be as a mourning bride, if it please you, since the mask will hide your face."

"It pleases me well, my Lord," Lady Anne retorted; "more especially as there will be few, as I think, to show even so much sorrow as is expressed by a sombre dress."

"His Majesty loves those of a cheerful countenance, and life is a brittle thing at best," retorted the Earl; "but, since it is a masquerade,

none will take account of your sorrow or be hurt by it. 'Twill pass, for I doubt not that Hinchinbroke is even now a sound man and impatient for his wife's kisses."

"I am your Lordship's dutiful daughter," Lady Anne murmured.

"So I love you best," and my Lord bent and kissed her cheek.

Now, albeit she had consented with reluctance, the lady found the King's rout more to her liking as the time for it drew nearer. 'Twas more agreeable to her fancy than thinking on a betrothed husband whom she had never seen and whom now she dreaded ever to see, even though the report was that he was mending fast. What did that matter? For herself, she had rather die many times than live bearing the marks of the foul and loathsome disease. The babble of her maid, miscalled Prudence, gave the horror that she felt no chance to abate, and yet, much as she strove, she could find no words to bid the slut have done. She looked forward to the masquerade with an eagerness which she was herself at a loss to account for, as though it might open a way of escape from the bondage that she dreaded.

Now it so happened that at this very time, when the Lady Anne Boyle was busied about the King's masquerade, Lord Hinchinbroke was seeking her at Burlington House. He had journeyed leisurely from Paris, being still weak from the sickness, and being, in truth, in no great haste to greet his betrothed. Since he was a man of spirit, it had pleased him ill that his father should do his wooing, and that his name and honour should be pledged for a dowry of ten thousand guineas. So he was not greatly grieved to learn that my Lord Burlington and his daughter had fled from the plague. When he had rested a little, he set out with his servant for Richmond, and lay for the night at the "White Hart." There he learned that the King and his Court were at Hampton Court, and had prepared a great rout to please my Lady Castlemaine on the next night, and that His Majesty had commanded all the guests to wear masks and strange garments, as was the custom in France.

Now, although my Lord Hinchinbroke was in little mind for mirth or jest, any more than he was for marriage with a lady whom all the world praised, yet the King's masquerade promised him some little diversion from his present discontents. So he bade his servant seek him a fitting garment for his disguise.

"A mendicant's dress will best befit one who must enrich himself at the cost of his pride," he muttered, as he fitted on the long-bearded mask and threw the ragged gown over his green velvet doublet, hiding the glittering jewels on his breast.

The servant who guarded the entrance to the Palace drew his white wand across the doorway.

"Whom do you seek, Sir Mendicant?" he demanded.

"The King's Alms," Lord Hinchinbroke returned.

"Of whom do you seek it?" the servant asked again.

"Of the Father of his People," my Lord made answer.

The man lowered his wand.

"Good luck to your begging," he said, allowing Lord Hinchinbroke to enter.

The great hall of the Palace was thronged with guests dressed in

all kinds of strange costumes. In their midst was an old, grey-bearded man clad as a shepherd and bearing a long crook. At the end of the chamber was a group of some thirty musicians, habited as monkeys. The shepherd raised his crook, and at the signal the music began, whilst the guests waited expectantly. Again the crook was raised and the dance began, making as strange a picture as Lord Hinchinbroke's eyes had ever looked upon. By his side was a slender, dark-robed figure, a white, rounded chin showing beneath the mask.

He bowed low before her.

"Lady," he said, "do not refuse a mendicant's first prayer."

She gave him her hand without answering, and the next moment they had joined the whirling crowd of dancers. Quicker and quicker came the notes of the music, faster and faster sped the dancers, until their feet scarce touched the oaken floor. Then suddenly the music ceased and the dancers paused, breathless.

Lord Hinchinbroke drew his companion from the crowd, whilst swift-footed lackeys ran hither and thither bearing wine and fruit for the guests.

"Your step is light," said he, "for one who mourns a lover."

"And your mood merry for one that lives by man's charity," she retorted, and the sweetness of her voice caught him.

"We are the favoured children of God," the mendicant answered, with solemnity; "we seek heavy purses and ready hands to aid our needs."

She looked up at him suddenly. Through the mask looked a pair of dark eyes so piercing that for an instant she thought it was the King who spoke to her. Then her eyes fell before his and she was silent.

"We both wear the garb of sorrow," he went on, watching her, "and yet I never knew feet lighter in the dance."

"I would they were fleetlier still," she murmured.

"To fly to your lover?"

"Nay," she returned, with some passion; "but to escape, to escape from a master."

Again the dark eyes sought to pierce the mask which covered her face.

"You would escape?" he said, in a low voice. "Why, then, we are comrades."

"What has a mendicant to fear save lean purses and niggard hands?"

"Whom would a mourning bride escape?"

She answered him nothing, but her heart beat hot beneath his gaze. Ah, if she could only escape!

And he, too, was thinking of escape, but yet with a more rebellious and desperate heart.

He drew her from the throng.

"I am too sad to dance again," he whispered. "See, the moon has risen. Come, let us talk of our sorrows."

She went with him meekly, wondering at her own lack of pride, but with a strange happiness in her breast. What trouble had he but poverty, if his garb told anything? And she—why, 'twas her dowry of ten thousand guineas that had made her acquainted with grief. She was surprised at his knowledge of the Palace as, with unflinching steps, he led her to a little chamber dimly illumined save for the white light of the moon reflected from the river.

"You know the Palace?" she said, at length.



"Summon my Lord Burlington," said His Majesty.

"TH KING'S MASK."

"'Tis a mendicant's business," he answered, lightly.
 "I pray that it will serve you well."
 "Why, so it has, since I have brought you hither."
 "To what purpose, sir?" she asked, wondering who he was and what his station.
 "I know not, unless it be to ask you why a bride should mourn.
 She hung her head.
 "I am but promised," she murmured.
 "And your lover is a laggard?" he said, looking at her curiously.
 "Nay, nay! My husband comes quickly, and then, alas!"
 "You would escape?" he pursued.
 She did not answer.
 "You would escape?" he repeated, relentlessly. His eyes compelled her reply.
 "I would escape," she whispered.
 He looked at the river, where the Royal barges rode, lining the shore, silvered in the moonlight.
 "Why, so would I!" he cried, catching her hand.
 "You?" she exclaimed.
 "Aye, since my hand was pledged while my heart was free as it has been until this hour, but now I swear that your eyes have made me a captive. Madam, I pray you raise your mask."
 "I dare not," she murmured; "there is a penalty."
 "Then I will risk a thousand crowns to give you courage."
 He took the bearded mask from his face and revealed the countenance of a young man of more than ordinary comeliness, which, beneath its pallor, showed dignity and not a little pride.
 She gazed at him for a moment, as if spell-bound; then, remembering another's face, scarred and unsightly with the small-pox, she covered her face with her hands.
 "Madam," he said, "I await your courtesy."
 With trembling fingers she loosed the strings and the mask fell to the floor.
 He flung himself upon his knees and kissed her hands. Then, rising, he caught her in his arms.
 "Sweetheart!" he cried, "let us fly, for the same fate pursues each of us. To-morrow—"
 "Ha, here are the traitors!" exclaimed a voice behind them.

They sprang apart, and then fell upon their knees before the old man with the shepherd's crook, for to only one man in England could that voice belong.

"What!" cried the King, "is it thus that you mock your Sovereign's commands and dare appear unmasked, despite His august Majesty's decree? My Lady Anne Boyle, what have you to answer?"

"The Lady Anne Boyle!" exclaimed Hinchinbroke, doubting his senses.

"And you, my Lord Hinchinbroke, what answer have you to give?"

"Hinchinbroke!" the girl murmured, covering her face.

"I throw myself upon your Majesty's mercy," said the young man, his face full of joy.

"Why, then," went on the King, "you shall have such mercy as you deserve, seeing that your face is still pale from the sickness, albeit I can discern no repentance in it. Ho, call the guard!" and he cast the mask from his face.

The guard entered, and, having made obeisance before the King, took their stand behind the two prisoners.

"Summon my Lord Burlington," said His Majesty.

One of the King's gentlemen hastened from the chamber, while the culprits stood waiting for their sentence—one with downcast eyes and clasped hands, the other with proud face and upright carriage.

The Earl of Burlington came in quickly, with an anxious face, and knelt before the King. Then, catching sight of his daughter, he exclaimed—

"Anne, what do you here?"

"My Lord," said the King, "I command you to take charge of these prisoners who have disobeyed their Sovereign's commands, and at your peril keep them and let them not be set at liberty until the sum of one thousand crowns be paid to replenish our Royal treasury and they be made man and wife according to the laws of England."

"Your Majesty —," began Lord Hinchinbroke, struck to the heart by so great clemency.

"Tush!" returned His Majesty, smiling, "am I not indeed the Father of my People? and so I ask no thanks, but only a kiss from the fairest of the King's children."



A song to thee, oh thoroughfare
 Whose windows bright with bargains glow,
 When westerling sunset rays declare
 The day is done—and yet I know
 Not if to call thee friend or foe;
 Nor shall my song be sad or sweet,
 For thou—De Quincey named thee so—
 Art stony-hearted Oxford Street!

High jostles Low, Joy elbows Care,
 And Wealth trips side-by-side with Woe;
 Both through the selfsame plate-glass stare—
 And, after all, 'twixt high and low
 The difference is a dice-box throw;
 Since well-tyred wheels and ill-shod feet
 Alike may find thee as they go,
 Still stony-hearted Oxford Street!

And I who dream of meadows fair,
 Of gardens wherein roses blow,
 Still find thy stones my shoes outwear
 Far more than country lanes, where grow
 God's wild-flowers in unstudied row!
 Your blooms are false, all made to meet
 Blind Fashion's eye—for gaud and show,
 My stony-hearted Oxford Street!

ENVOI.

Prince, when old Time my locks shall mow,
 And bid my chill heart cease to beat,
 Lay me, I prithee, not below
 This stony-hearted Oxford Street!

CLIFTON BINGHAM.

The Sketch

No. 1338.—Vol. CIII.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1918.

ONE SHILLING.



A RUSSIAN DANCER AS EGYPT'S MOST FAMOUS QUEEN: MME. LUBOV TCHERNICHEVA IN THE NAME-PART
OF "CLEOPATRA," AT THE LONDON COLISEUM.

Mme. Lubov Tchernicheva makes a dazzling Cleopatra in the ballet of that name, with which the Diaghileff company recently began its season at the Coliseum. She is a consummate mime, and interprets the looks and gestures of the cruel queen, who exacts a man's life for a kiss, with wonderful skill. A striking feature of the performance is her arrival in

a huge sarcophagus, swathed mummy-fashion in interminable draperies, which are gradually unfolded until she emerges, a vision of surpassing beauty. Mme. Tchernicheva has been seen before at Drury Lane, where she appeared in 1914, both in "Cleopatra" and other ballets, but never in more striking fashion.—[Photograph by Malcolm Arbuthnot.]